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The Emergence of Digital Childhood — Is This Really Wise?

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The easiest way to infuriate the young is to lean into nostalgia. Nevertheless, it's hard not to be nostalgic for a childhood in which the basic equipment for elementary school was pretty much limited to notebooks, pencils, and an occasional ruler. Those days are long gone.

Verizon Wireless recently released a national survey of parents. The study revealed that the average age at which parents give their children their first cell phone is 11.6. Do sixth graders really need a cell phone?

Well, hold on. The same survey indicated that ten percent of parents give their children a cell phone between the ages of 7 and 9. A recent Nielsen Company study indicated that the average age for a first phone in many families may be as low as 9.7.

Most parents said that safety is their concern. But how many 7-9 year-olds are waiting on the curb at the mall for mom to pick them up? Maybe I don't want to know the answer to that question. In reality, few second-graders need a cell phone for safety in that sense. Something else is going on here, and the net result is that children are being pushed into the digital world at ever-earlier ages.

The Verizon survey also revealed that many parents fail to set any rules or protections for their offspring's use of the cell phone. The danger of this is increased when it is realized



that many of these cell phones are actually smart phones with advanced Internet access and access to social media. This effectively puts a miniature computer with unrestricted Web access in the hands of very young children.

There can be no doubt that we are all now living in a digital world. The digital revolution has wrought wonders and unparalleled access. But it has also brought unprecedented dangers — and those dangers are magnified when it comes to children and teenagers. This Verizon survey should serve as a wake-up call to parents and to all those who care for the coming generation. Childhood is being left in the dust of the digital transformation.

One final observation: When parents did set rules for how a child was to use a cell phone, the most common rule was that the child had to answer the phone when a parent called. Now, that rule makes sense.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler

The Verizon Wireless survey results can be seen [here](http://www.smartphoneparenting.com/survey.html):
<http://www.smartphoneparenting.com/survey.html>

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