

Before You Buy

Christmas is coming.

And every parent knows the moment: your child looks up at you with that hopeful grin and says, "Everyone else has one." Whether it's a new phone, gaming system, or tablet, the pressure is real. Technology promises connection and convenience, but it also brings questions that every family has to face: Are we ready for this? What are the risks? How can we protect them?

At The Heights, we want to help families make those decisions with wisdom and confidence, not pressure or guilt. Asking these questions is more than a pause before a purchase, it's an intentional moment to step back, think deeply, and align technology choices with what matters most in your home. Technology can be an amazing servant - helping us learn, create, and connect - but it makes a terrible master. It shapes habits, influences relationships, and silently molds what we love and prioritize. That's why we encourage parents to ask not just if they should buy, but why.

WHAT DO THEY NEED?

- **Start simple.** If your goal is for your child to have a way to reach you in case of emergencies, a basic phone or smartwatch with calling features is the safest and most affordable option.
- **Decide what kind of access you're comfortable with.** If your child doesn't need full internet or app access, consider a limited phone plan, a filtered smartphone, or a prepaid device that keeps communication clear but boundaries firm.
- **Ask the bigger question.** What will my child gain by having their own device? Think beyond convenience—consider how this decision will shape their habits, maturity, and family rhythms.

ARE THEY READY?

- **You set the standard.** Every child is different, so take time to decide what's truly best for yours. Maturity matters more than age when it comes to handling technology well.
- **Check for responsibility.** Is your child ready to take care of an expensive device? Do they manage their belongings, chores, or schoolwork without constant reminders?
- **Look for respect and follow-through.** How do they respond to boundaries in other areas like bedtimes, homework, screen time, or social rules? Consistency in those small things reveals readiness for bigger freedoms.
- **Ask yourself if you're ready.** Are you prepared to model healthy digital habits, set clear boundaries, and have ongoing conversations about online safety, content, and balance? Your guidance is their greatest filter.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- **Internet access is rarely limited anymore. Any device with 5G or Wi-Fi instantly connects your child to the full online world — good and bad. Know what doors you're opening before you hand it over.**
- **Monitoring mobile devices takes more than a filter. Phones and tablets are harder to supervise than a family computer; they go everywhere your child goes and can access almost anything with a few taps.**
- **Constant connection can quietly consume attention. Unlimited access to texting, streaming, gaming, and social media creates nonstop stimulation that often leads to distraction, comparison, and even digital dependency.**

HOW CAN YOU PROTECT THEM?

- **Filtering and monitoring often require more than built-in settings. Many devices give unrestricted internet access by default. Consider investing in a trusted filtering or monitoring service to add a stronger layer of protection.**
- **Protection starts with presence, not just products. The best safeguards are still clear expectations, open conversations, and consistent involvement.**
- **Set boundaries early, when they're most open to them. Kids are often more willing to follow guidelines like "Devices charge overnight in the kitchen" or "Parents know the password and can check activity anytime" if those rules are part of the purchase from day one.**

The goal isn't to say "no" to every new thing; it's to say "yes" for the right reasons, at the right time. This Christmas season, every purchase will tell a story about what your family values. When you slow down and choose purpose over pressure, you teach your kids that technology can serve your family's mission, and not the other way around.

So before you buy, take a breath. Ask the questions that matter. Because the real investment isn't in the device; it's in your family's future.