NEWS LESSON

Would You Buy a Phone That Does Less?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What is a phone useful for besides social media?
2. Would you choose a phone that could call and play music but had no feed?
3. Who should help decide a child's first phone rules?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**anxiety** ☐	A	the state of being in contact with something, often harmful
2	**compact** ☐	B	small and neatly designed
3	**distinctive** ☐	C	a worried, nervous feeling
4	**designated** ☐	D	chosen for a particular purpose
5	**exposure** ☐	E	limits that show what is allowed
6	**burden** ☐	F	making an exact copy of something
7	**boundaries** ☐	G	clearly different from others
8	**reproducing** ☐	H	something heavy or hard that you must carry or deal with

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A deliberately limited device may protect a child from harmful content while shutting them out of their friends' group chats. No product settles that trade-off.

1 Few parenting decisions seem to generate quite as much anxiety as the first smartphone. Adults want children to be able to call home, arrange to meet friends and develop independence. At the same time, handing over a conventional device can mean opening the door to social media, addictive video feeds and online spaces that even adults struggle to navigate responsibly. In 2026, US start-up Freckle announced a phone for children without social media. The idea was to keep useful tools while leaving out the feed. Whether families would find it helpful remained to be seen.

2 Freckle's compact device is aimed primarily at seven- to thirteen-year-olds. Running on the company's ClayOS operating system, it excludes a general web browser, app store, social media platforms and YouTube. Calling and messaging are limited to parent-approved contacts, while a separate application allows adults to introduce new capabilities over time. The colourful hardware and small square touchscreen are intended to appeal to children without simply reproducing the design and functions of an adult smartphone. The company is trying to occupy the middle ground between a basic communication device and a fully connected digital world.

3 Its most distinctive feature may be a discovery camera designed to identify plants, birds and insects, allowing children to build a digital collection of what they find outdoors. In theory, technology becomes a reason to head out into the world rather than withdraw from it. Location tracking and alerts linked to designated areas could also give parents greater confidence as children begin travelling independently. Yet those same features raise a delicate question: how much freedom does a child really gain if every movement can be monitored?

4 Announced at $199 with a wireless plan of approximately $25 a month, the phone was expected to begin shipping in December 2026. At the time of its launch publicity, therefore, promises about its effects on childhood behaviour remained largely untested. A thoughtfully designed product might encourage healthier habits, but it cannot by itself prove that children will spend more time outdoors or become more resilient. Family expectations, friendship groups, local safety and the child's own interests will all influence what happens once the device is taken out of the box.

5 There is also the problem of social belonging. Children increasingly organise friendships through group chats, games and shared online spaces. A device that shuts out those channels could protect a child from harmful content while simultaneously making them feel excluded. Conversely, expecting very young users to manage persuasive platforms without guidance places a heavy burden on developing judgement. Parents are caught between two legitimate goals: reducing exposure to risks and teaching children to recognise those risks for themselves.

6 Freckle's most valuable contribution may be less the hardware than the question it forces families to confront. Why do we assume that a phone must provide access to everything, immediately and without stages? A carefully limited device may suit some children, while others will need a different approach. No single product can remove the difficult work of setting boundaries, having conversations and gradually handing over responsibility. But an alternative to the all-purpose smartphone makes it easier to imagine technology serving childhood, rather than childhood being organised around technology.

Sources: Fast Company. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The text suggests that a device built for safety can create a different problem for a child. T F NG
2. The same features that give parents confidence also let them follow a child's movements. T F NG
3. Families already using the phone have shown that children spend more time outdoors. T F NG
4. Rival companies have announced similar devices for children. T F NG
5. The writer suggests the phone's limits will suit every child. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

confront **conventional** **ephemeral** **legitimate** **monitor** **persuasive** **simultaneously** **withdraw**

1. Critics argued that the _____ approach to schooling no longer prepared pupils for creative work.
2. After the criticism, several members chose to _____ from the committee rather than defend its decision.
3. Advertising aimed at children is often so _____ that adults struggle to resist it themselves.
4. No single member of staff can _____ supervise two classrooms on opposite sides of the building.
5. Both sides had _____ concerns, so the mediator refused to call either position unreasonable.
6. The documentary forces viewers to _____ uncomfortable questions about their own habits.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Experts warn of the _____ of children to online manipulation. (VULNERABLE)
2. The charity has called for greater _____ about how companies use children's data. (TRANSPARENT)
3. It would be _____ to expect a child to resist a platform built by hundreds of engineers. (REALISTIC)
4. Many parents find round-the-clock tracking _____ and prefer to build trust instead. (INTRUDE)
5. Her _____ to put the phone away at dinner surprised her parents. (WILLING)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A collocation is a pair that fluent speakers reach for by habit. Ask which verb normally sits with the noun, not which verb simply makes sense.

bear **draw** **exert** **set** **strike** **tread** **voiced**

1. Regulators are under mounting pressure to _____ a balance between innovation and child safety.
2. Peer pressure can _____ a powerful influence over what children choose to wear and watch.
3. Several headteachers have publicly _____ concerns about children's sleep.
4. The ruling could _____ a precedent that other courts feel obliged to follow.
5. Platforms should _____ some responsibility for the content they recommend to children.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would make a limited phone feel like freedom rather than punishment?
2. Should phone rules depend more on age or on how someone uses it?
3. What would a phone designed around what children actually need look like?

9 Role-play: a first phone for a ten-year-old

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · a parent

Your daughter is ten and wants a phone. You want a simple one with calls and a camera but no social media. Explain your reasons and ask what your friend thinks.

Student B · a friend

Your son has a full smartphone. You think a limited phone may make a child feel left out. Say what worries you, but listen to your friend's reasons.

Useful phrases

I'd rather she didn't have social media yet.
I'm worried she'll feel left out.
That's a fair point, but safety matters more to me.
What do her friends use?
Couldn't we try it for a few months?
I'd be happy to review the rules when she's older.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the two friends agree, and what was the compromise?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 C · 2 B · 3 G · 4 D · 5 A · 6 H · 7 E · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 conventional · 2 withdraw · 3 persuasive · 4 simultaneously · 5 legitimate · 6 confront

6 Word forms

1 vulnerability · 2 transparency · 3 unrealistic · 4 intrusive · 5 willingness

7 Language focus

1 strike · 2 exert · 3 voiced · 4 set · 5 bear

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