

Parent Advice - Is It Really Smart To Give Kids Your Old Smartphone?

Hand-Me-Down Tech May Give Kids More Than You Bargained For

I'm the baby of my family, so I was the one who got the hand-me-downs. Nearly every winter coat and pair of snow boots passed from my brother to my sister to me. And while I can't say I loved a certain threadbare, brown corduroy jacket, it kept me warm, and it sure helped me understand the value of a dollar.

Today's kids still get secondhand stuff, but when it comes to high-tech devices, "previously owned" can be very advanced. Once kids get a taste of a maybe-not-the-latest-but-still-pretty-cool device, it's a quick jump to the stuff that younger ones may not be ready for, like social networking, massively multiplayer online games, video chatting, and location services. But that's hard to explain when they've just received the device that gives them entrée into that world -- from you.

I'm not pointing fingers, because we do it in our family, too.

My husband's old iPod Touch became my son's when hubby moved up to a smartphone with a built-in MP3 player. My son was 11 and just getting into the Beatles, and we were more than happy to foster his love of great music.

But it wasn't long before we realized that we hadn't even scratched the surface of what the Touch could do. Of course, my son was all too eager to maximize the device's capabilities by watching TV on it. Who knew?

Lots of families pass along their used devices to their kids. Sometimes it just makes sense, and in some cases, it's cost effective. But it's important to remember that these are very powerful devices that aren't necessarily designed with kids in mind.

Here are four lessons -- which I learned the hard way -- on how to smoothly transition your old device so you can focus on what's really

important: playing with your new one!

How to Manage Your Device's Second Life

Lesson one: Know what the device can do. If something has powerful features, rest assured that your kid will discover them and want to use them. Do your research so you can talk to your kids -- and set limits on -- these capabilities.

Lesson two: Turn off -- or don't pay for -- the stuff you don't want your kids to use. Use the device's parental controls to lock features that you don't want your kid to access. Things like location services, downloading ability, and even data plans are all things your kid may not need. Explain to your kids that you'll unlock the features as they grow into them.

Lesson three: Discuss responsible ownership. When you give kids high-tech devices, you're putting a lot of power in their hands. Talk about your expectations for responsible ownership, like not taking or posting embarrassing photos on Facebook, learning the importance of privacy settings, or even figuring out how to tell when an ad is a scam.

Lesson four: Check yourself. Would you be giving your kid such a powerful device anyway? If the device is, say, a few technical notches above what you'd probably buy for them, maybe now isn't the time to bequeath it after all.

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