



## NETIVOT HATORAH DAY SCHOOL CELL PHONE POLICY 2023/2024

Netivot HaTorah Day School is committed to fostering an environment that promotes the holistic Development, well-being and growth of our students. In alignment with this commitment, we have updated our acceptable use policy with a comprehensive cell phone policy to ensure that our school remains a space where students can thrive academically, socially and spiritually.

The revised Netivot cell phone policy is motivated by the following observations:

- **Developing a Connection to Hashem and Torah.** The world is surely filled with many stimuli that call for our children's attention. Some ideas are growth-oriented while others hold the potential for distraction and harmful negative influence that draw the mind of our students away from the Torah values that we seek to foster and develop. Netivot ought to be the place where the negative forces are rendered quiet and ineffective. Our policy of no phones in the school is intended to allow the school environment to strengthen each student's connection to Hashem and Torah by minimizing competing influences.
- **Developing a healthy community.** Over the last decade we have observed a notable decline in the quality of face-to-face human interactions that are critical to healthy adolescent and communal development. Young people's ability to sustain extended conversation, dive deeply into thoughts and ideas and listen actively and empathetically have all been adversely impacted by the ubiquity and availability of phones at times that could otherwise be used for person-to-person interactions.
- **Developing a healthy self.**<sup>1</sup> There is now an overwhelming amount of correlational evidence suggesting a toxic three-way relationship between social media, the developing adolescent brain, and the phone as a delivery mechanism for social media platforms. This correlation has been well documented where teenage smartphone usage strongly coincides with an overwhelming increase in mental health challenges.<sup>2</sup> Even as it is difficult to find causal trends in social dynamics, recent work has shown the beginnings of a strong causal relationship between smartphone usage and teen mental health.<sup>3</sup> At a minimum, our collective experience suggests to us that adolescent life is being fundamentally altered to the negative by exposure to social media at a developmentally inappropriate time.
- **Developing digital citizenship.** Our approach in the years leading up to this decision has been to try and promote a healthy and self-restricting relationship with technology at school in the hope that our students will learn the appropriate times and places to interact with their phones and when to keep them off. We have come to believe that this learning process requires a mandatory time period off of phones. Phones, in contrast to computers and tablets, provide a pervasive and effortless delivery system for products that are designed to develop addictive behaviour among users.<sup>4</sup> The addictive design of social media and the role the phone plays in its delivery have convinced us that learning responsible use is best supported by fully removing the phone from the school environment, where socialization and learning are at a most critical moment.



- **A developing movement in education.** We are hardly alone in observing these troubling signs in adolescent development and in taking proactive steps to establish restricted technology environments at school. Recently, a number of yeshiva high schools across North America have taken steps to further limit or remove phones from school.<sup>5</sup> And, perhaps most notably, a large number of completely device-free schools exist in Silicon Valley, where much of this technology is developed.<sup>6</sup>

To these ends, we will be adopting the following policy for phones in school:

**While in the school building, all students are *prohibited* from using a cellphone or carrying a cellphone on their person during school hours.**

Students in Grades up to five, are required to keep their phones off and in their school bags at all times. Students in Grade 6-8 will be expected to put their phones in their school bags prior to entering the building in the morning. After davening, students are expected to keep their phone off and **INSIDE** their lockers at all times. Phones may not be on their person at any point during the school day. Students must place their phones in their bags before entering the school building in the morning and then into their lockers after davening. Phones must remain in student lockers until they are dismissed for the day.

Alternatively, there will be phone lockers assigned to each middle school class with specific pockets allocated to each student. Students are strongly encouraged to place their phones in the lockers at the start of each day, to be retrieved at the end of the school day.

There will be escalating consequences for students who either use or carry their phones with them in school:

*First offense* – a phone seen during school hours, in the school building, will be confiscated, placed in a locker in the office, and returned at the end of the day.

*Second offense* – a phone that is seen again following a first offence will be required to be handed in to the office everyday for a week following.

*Third offense* – a student who has already had a second offence and is then found in possession of a phone a third time, will have to place their phone in the locker in the office each day until the end of the year.

The following measures will be in place to support the new phone policy:

- A student phone will be available in the school offices for students to make necessary phone calls (illness, etc.).
- Parents will be able to call into the school office and leave messages for their children.



- Students will be permitted to use their school-issued chromebooks in school, and as directed by their teacher during class. Our established [chromebook policy](#) continues to be in effect.

We recognize that this will be a major change for some of our students, but in the interest of their mental health, academic success, and personal accountability this policy is of critical importance.

**The Acceptable Use Policy for smart devices and mobile devices also applies to students during school excursions and extra-curricular activities.**

Please take the time to review this policy with your children and sign [this form](#) by the first day of school. It is critical that we partner to effect this positive change towards our school culture.

References:

1. Haidt, Jonathan. "Why the Past 10 Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid." *The Atlantic*, 29 Dec. 2022. [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/social-media-democracy-trust-babel/629369](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/social-media-democracy-trust-babel/629369).
2. Abi-Jaoude, Elia et al. "Smartphones, social media use and youth mental health." *CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association journal = journal de l'Association medicale canadienne* vol. 192,6 (2020): E136-E141. doi:10.1503/cmaj.190434. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7012622](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7012622).
3. Lorenz-Spreen, Philipp, et al. "A Systematic Review of Worldwide Causal and Correlational Evidence on Digital Media and Democracy." SocArXiv, 22 Nov. 2021. <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/p3z9v>.
4. See source 2.
5. Avishur, Maccabee. "Yeshiva High Schools Join Together to Limit Student Cell Phone Use: Parents Can Help." *Jewish Link*, 25 Aug. 2022. [jewishlink.news/features/53166-yeshiva-high-schools-join-together-to-limit-student-cell-phone-use-parents-can-help](http://jewishlink.news/features/53166-yeshiva-high-schools-join-together-to-limit-student-cell-phone-use-parents-can-help).
6. Richtel, Matt. "A Silicon Valley School That Doesn't Compute." *The New York Times*, 22 Oct. 2011. [www.nytimes.com/2011/10/23/technology/at-waldorf-school-in-silicon-valley-technology-can-wait.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/23/technology/at-waldorf-school-in-silicon-valley-technology-can-wait.html).