



## Media & Smart Device Policy & Recommendations

Adopted September 2024; Revised February 2025; Revised August 2025

### Why Media-Free?

Modern science is validating what Waldorf educators have known for a long time: the consumption of media by infants, children, and young people inhibits their healthy development.

At Summerfield Waldorf School & Farm, we place an emphasis on direct human interaction and authentic experiences. Studies show that a direct experience, as opposed to a virtual one, has a measurable positive impact on brain development throughout childhood into adulthood. Children are better off when none have access to these devices until they are ready for them.

Issues associated with premature media and phone usage, especially smartphones with unlimited internet access, are proven to have detrimental effects on a young person's social, emotional, and psychological stability and well-being. It can cause:

- attention issues
- early consumerism
- mental health struggles
- instances of online bullying
- exposure to explicit online content

### Development of Policies/Recommendations for Media & Smart Devices

As the faculty and staff of the school, we recognize the need to delay the age at which children are given Smart devices and social media accounts, but many families feel concerns and pressure around making this decision.

When we coordinate our decisions by mutual agreement, it is with an understanding the policy or recommendation stemmed from an intensive focus (study) by our College of Teachers aligned in Waldorf Education pedagogy, current topical research, data & external studies, Faculty and Staff recommendations, parent feedback, and a unified desire for a long-term outcome beneficial to all students. This is referred to as *collective action*. We can build this action for the benefit of all children and students by voluntary coordination; this means parents and caregivers strive together so that there is the likelihood their children will have friends who have the same rules, and will not feel they are the 'only ones' not accessing phones, digital devices, and social media.

Together, Summerfield as a school – Board members, All-School Director, College of Teachers, faculty, staff, parents, and caregivers – can strive to provide our young people with more and better experiences in the

real world, less and better experiences on screens, and more in-person, play-based time, with ever-growing independence and responsibility.

## Media and Smart Device use for families on campus

As staff and faculty, parents and visitors, we are all striving to be models for the younger generation. Our policies around Media and Smart Devices enhance your child's healthy development and learning. Your collaboration and modeling of healthy habits supports the educational goals and well-being of the Summerfield Waldorf community as a whole. **To support this goal, adults are asked not to use Smart Devices while on/visiting Summerfield's campus.**

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## Media & Smart Device: DEFINITIONS

MEDIA is defined as the following: Screened devices such as television, movies, videos, laptops, tablets, gaming, and social media usage

SMART DEVICES are defined as follows: SmartPhone, tablet, laptop, SmartWatch, e-music players, e-readers\*, Bluetooth-compatible earbuds, SmartGlasses; internet/wifi-connected devices.

## Media & Smart Device: POLICIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

*Families joining our community should understand we hold an ideal and strive to keep all our students screen, electronic, and social media-free until at least Grade 6. Further, we hold the value that it is beneficial to keep them screen, electronic, and social media-free well beyond this age. We recommend no smart phone until Grade 9 and no social media use until Grade 11.*

### Early Childhood Education Preschool – Kindergarten

- *On-Campus Policy:* No Media or Smart Device usage on campus for students in ECE.
- *At-Home Recommendations:* No Media or Smart Device usage at home for ECE students.

### Lower School Grades 1–6

- *On-Campus Policy:* No Media or Smart Device usage on campus for students in Grades 1–6. Any unpermitted devices will be collected and held in the Main Office until the students' parents can pick them up.
- *At-Home Recommendations:* No Media or Smart Device usage at home for lower school students.

### Middle School Grades 7–8

- *On-Campus Policy:* No Media or Smart Device usage on campus for students in Grades 7–8. Any unpermitted devices will be collected and held in the Main Office until the students' parents can pick them up. If a child uses a smart device to bike to school and check in with parents upon arrival, the office should be made aware, and the student needs to check the device into the Main Office each morning upon arrival and come pick it up at dismissal.
- *At-Home Recommendations:* Teachers and class communities will come together to craft and update agreements to shape the measured introduction of Media and Smart Devices when

developmentally appropriate. If the family decides a phone is needed for their child, choose a flip phone or phone with no internet access. Parental controls and agreements for parental oversight of text messages are encouraged. We recommend no smart phones until 9th grade.

## High School Grades 9–12

*The Summerfield High School Faculty and Staff firmly believe that being smart device-free during the school day improves a student's attention, sense of self, healthy social interaction, and mental health. We are committed to creating a learning environment where each student can be as fully present and fully themselves as possible.*

- **On-Campus Policy:** At parents/guardians' discretion, SmartPhones are allowed in Grades 9–12, but are checked in at the High School office during the school day from 7:45–3:10pm. Please see Smart Device Check-In Policy below. Media is introduced in developmentally appropriate ways. Students leave Summerfield prepared and ready to engage with digital technology.
- **At-Home Recommendations:** We recommend no social media use until Grade 11.

## On-Campus High School Smart Device Check-In Policy

**Before school:** Students who have cell phones and/or Smart Watches need to **power them off** and place them in the cell phone holder in front of the office when they arrive on campus. Cell phones and Smart Watches should not be kept on their person or left in their cars.

**After 8:25 am:** The phone box will be moved into the high school office. Tardy students will need to go to the office to sign in and check their phones in.

**After school:** At 3:10 pm phones will be available to students. **Students may use their phones on campus only between 3:10 pm and 3:30 pm and only in the area in front of the High School office.**

## \*Special Circumstances: Learning Support Devices

If it is necessary for a student to bring an electronic device to school for learning or auditory support purposes, parents must submit, in advance, a permission request form which is available in the Main Office. For a permitted electronic device, it will be checked into the Office directly upon arrival to Campus; device will not be accessible to the student throughout the day; device may be checked back out after dismissal time; device is to remain powered off and put away while being transported to/from the Office.

## Media & Smart Device FAQs

### ***What if my student doesn't have a phone or doesn't bring it to school?***

Parents may indicate this on the Summerfield High School Student Cell Phone Status & Device Confirmation Form, required of all high school students at the start of the school year. If a student forgets their phone, parents should call or email the high school office to let us know. Students are also not allowed to access phones left in their vehicles during the school day unless specific permission is given.

### ***What if my student needs to make a call during the school day?***

If students need to make brief phone calls for essential purposes during snack and lunch, they may do so from the student phone in the high school office. Between the hours of 3:10 and 3:30, students on campus (including the parking lot) are permitted to use their phones only in the area in front of the High School (near the Annex and Bio lab).

### ***What if a parent needs to contact their child during the school day?***

Parents who need to get a message to their students may do so via email or phone to the high school office: (707) 575-7194, x106.

### ***What about students who don't turn their phones in?***

Students who are found to have a Smart Device during the school day will have the device confiscated and their parents and mentor will be notified. The second time a student is found to have their device, follow-up steps will be set in motion.

### ***What is the policy after school?***

After 3:30, students on campus not attending a school function may use their phones at the discretion of the adults supervising the after-school activity (ex: coaches, dance chaperones, etc.).

## Resources

### For parents of all aged children

*The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt

### For parents of younger children

*Simplicity Parenting* by Kim John Payne and Lisa Ross

*You Are Your Child's First Teacher: Encouraging Your Child's Natural Development from Birth to Age Six* by Rahima Baldwin Dancy

### For parents of teenagers

*Surviving Your Child's Adolescence* by Carl Pickhardt

*The Media and Me: A Guide to Critical Media Literacy for Young People* by Ben Boyington, Allison T. Butler.

*For Goodness Sex: Changing the Way We Talk to Teens About Sexuality, Values, and Health* by Al Vernacchio