



The only safe way to introduce phones in recovery

Treatment programs can reintroduce phones more safely by using the Bark Phone, supporting recovery, connection, and independence.

Executive summary

Phones are inevitable in recovery

Teens need connection, independence, and preparation for life after treatment, but unrestricted access introduces risk.

Off-the-shelf solutions fall short

Standard iPhones and Apple Screen Time controls can be bypassed, leaving programs blind to unsafe messaging and content.

The Bark Phone provides a structured solution

Monitored, flexible, and phased access turns phones into a tool for safety, digital resilience, and therapeutic progress.

Today's reality: Phones are nearly impossible to avoid

Teens depend on phones for communication, socialization, and daily living. For programs, phones can help reduce barriers to entry, maintain family connections, and support the development of independence that recovery requires.

At the same time, phones provide direct access to social media, messaging, gaming platforms, and unfiltered online spaces.

The challenge isn't whether phones belong in recovery — it's how they are introduced and managed.

The dangers kids face online

Research shows that many teens encounter distressing or harmful experiences through their devices, even during treatment. According to Bark's 2024 annual report:



77% of teens

have experienced bullying as a bully, victim, or witness.



43% of teens

engaged in conversations about depression.



25% of teens

triggered alerts related to disordered eating.



Risks often hide in plain sight

Gaming apps like Discord — and even music apps like Spotify — allow direct messaging, creating private communication channels that may go unnoticed by organizations.

Phones, behavioral addiction, and recovery risk

Social media interactions trigger dopamine responses in the brain. Over time, these patterns can resemble behavioral addiction, making it harder for teens to disengage or self-regulate. This can create several challenges in recovery:

- Increased emotional reactivity and anxiety
- Difficulty tolerating boredom or distress
- Heightened sensitivity to peer approval or rejection
- Reduced focus on therapeutic work

At the same time, total phone removal introduces its own risks. Complete restriction can increase anxiety, isolate residents from support systems, and leave them unprepared for digital life after treatment.

Why iPhones don't work in recovery

Standard iPhones and Apple Screen Time controls aren't designed for treatment settings, providing unsafe communication that's difficult to monitor.

Teens find workarounds, hacks, and other ways to bypass limits, delete messages, and access unmonitored content.

“We struggled with iPhones because texts could be deleted, the internet could be accessed, and all sorts of dangers presented themselves. Apple Screen Time just wasn't working.”

– *Gabi Keele, Program Director, Poiema Foundation*

These tools also don't allow phased access or individualized monitoring, which are critical for recovery. Without the ability to tailor access and oversight to each teen's stage of recovery, programs are left managing risk instead of reducing it. Treatment environments need technology built for accountability, structure, and healing — not consumer devices retrofitted for control.

Meet the Bark Phone: A structured middle ground

The Bark Phone offers a balanced approach to technology. It allows organizations to reintroduce phones in phases, tailor digital access to individual treatment plans, and monitor online risk signals that might otherwise go unseen.



Bark's safety features are what treatment centers need

A phone in a treatment setting should do more than just connect teens — it must help **protect, monitor, and support recovery goals**. The Bark Phone was designed with features that address the unique needs of youth treatment programs:



Text and app monitoring

Get alerts for potential dangers.



Contact and app approval

Manage what teens can do and who they can talk to.



Texts can't be deleted

All messages are preserved for accountability.



Phased access

Add in new apps or remove them remotely.



Can be talk and text only

Unlock more privileges based on clinical readiness.



Screen time schedules

Set limits to promote rest and healthy device use.

Positive results and outcomes from the Bark Phone

Programs using Bark report outcomes like:

- Improved digital citizenship and safer online decision-making
- Greater emotional regulation around online triggers
- Increased confidence and readiness for post-treatment independence

“Bark helps our patients see the phone as a tool. It fits within our program focus, providing individualized support to help young adults adapt and gradually allow more freedom in a structured way.”

— Gage, *Engage Youth Adult Transitions*

Want to learn more?

For more information, contact sales@bark.us or visit bark.us/learn/behavioral-health.