Help Your Kids Be Safe With Mobile Phones

Teach your kids to think about safety when using a mobile phone.

What age is appropriate for a child to have a mobile phone? That's something for you and your family to decide. Consider your child's age, personality, and maturity, and your family's circumstances. Is he or she responsible enough to follow rules you or the school sets for phone use?

Many online applications also are on mobile phones—including social networking, blog posting, content uploading, media sharing, and video editing. Teach your kids to think about safety when using a mobile phone.

What can you do?

Use photo- and video-sharing by phone with care.

Most mobile phones now have cameras and video capability, making it easy for teens to capture and share every moment on the go. These tools can foster creativity and fun, yet they also present issues related to personal reputation and safety.

Encourage your teens to think about their privacy and that of others before they share photos and videos via mobile phone. It's easy to post photos and videos online without the knowledge—let alone the OK—of the photographer or the person in the shot. It could be embarrassing and even unsafe. It's easier to be smart up front about what media they share than to do damage control later on.

Don't stand for mobile bullying.

Mobile phones can be used to bully or harass others. Talk to your kids about treating others the same way they want to be treated. The manners and ethics you've taught them apply on phones.

Use good judgment with mobile social networking.

Many social networking sites have a feature that allows users to check their profiles and post comments from their phones, allowing access from anywhere. That means the filters you've installed on your home computer won't limit what kids can do on a phone. If your teens are going mobile with their profiles or blogs, talk to them about using good sense when they're social networking from their phones.

Get familiar with social mapping.

Many mobile phones now have Global Positioning System (GPS) technology installed: Kids with these phones can pinpoint where their friends are—and be pinpointed by their friends. Advise your kids to use these features only with friends they know in person and trust, and why not to broadcast their location to the world, 24/7. In addition, some carriers offer GPS services that let parents map their kid's location.

Decide on the right options and features for your kid's phone.

Both your mobile carrier and the phone itself should give you some choices for privacy settings and child safety controls. Most carriers allow parents to turn off features, like Web access, texting, or downloading. Some mobile phones are made especially for children. They're designed to be easy to use, and have features like limited Internet access, minute management, number privacy, and emergency buttons.

Be smart about smart phones.

Many phones include Web access. If your children are going to use a phone and you're concerned about what they might find on the Internet, turn off Web access or turn on filtering.

Develop mobile phone rules.

Talk to your kids about when and where it's appropriate to use their mobile phones. You also may want to establish rules for responsible use. Do you allow calls or texting at the dinner table? Do you have rules about mobile phone use at night? Should they give you their mobile phones while they're doing homework, or when they're supposed to be sleeping?

Set an example.

More mobile applications mean additional distractions. It's illegal to drive while texting, surfing, or talking on the phone in many states, but it's dangerous in every state. Set an example for your kids, and talk to them about the dangers of driving while distracted.

Sexting

Sending or forwarding sexually explicit photos, videos, or messages from a mobile phone is known as *sexting*. Tell your kids not to do it. In addition to risking their reputation and their friendships, they could be breaking the law if they create, forward, or even save this kind of message. Teens maybe less likely to make a bad choice if they know the consequences.

Texting

Any kid with a mobile phone probably uses it to send and receive text messages and images. It's similar to using e-mail or instant messaging and most of the same etiquette and safety rules apply. If your kids are texting, encourage them to:

- Respect others. Texting shorthand can lead to misunderstandings. Think about how a text message might be read and understood before sending it.
- Ignore text messages from people they don't know.
- Learn how to block numbers from their mobile phone.
- Avoid posting their mobile phone number online.
- Never provide financial information in response to a text message.

The CDC offers educators and parents the following strategies:

1. **Talk to your child.** Parents ask their children where they are going and who they are going with whenever they leave the house. They should take the same approach when their children go on the Internet—where are they going and who are they with?
2. **Develop rules.** Together with your child, develop rules about acceptable and safe behaviors for all electronic media.
3. **Explore the Internet.** Visit the Web sites your child frequents, and assess the pros and cons. Most Web sites and online activities are beneficial. They help young people learn new information and interact with people who have similar interests.
4. **Talk with others.** Talk to other parents about how they have discussed technology use with their children.
5. **Connect with the school.** Parents are encouraged to work with their child's school and school district to develop a class for parents that educates about school policies on electronic aggression and resources available to parents.
6. **Educate yourself.** Stay informed about the new devices and Web sites your child is using. Continually talk with your child and explore the technology yourself.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Kids and technology: Tips for parents in a high tech world*. Retrieved October 24, 2016, from http://www.cdc.gov