



Safe mobile phone use for Children

Children are so expert at the technology of a mobile phone some parents feel left behind. However mobiles can give parents peace of mind and be a means for both parents and children to contact each other in an emergency. As much as the technology can be helpful there are some downsides. The problem is that it is easy for children to use a mobile as they choose so a lot depends on trust. By taking an active interest in how your child uses their mobile phone and reminding them to keep the phone switched on at all times you will be able to contact your child and as importantly they will be able to contact you for any reason.

I'm considering purchasing a mobile phone for my child?

- Before buying the phone for your child it is helpful to discuss the rules around its use. e.g. Will it be for your child to use for emergencies only? Will they be able to purchase ringtones/games etc.? How much money should be allocated for the continued every day usage of the phone ? What times of day can it not be used?
- A 'pay as you go phone' is popular because they are cheap to purchase and for parents to keep track of expenditure.
- Talk to the phone store about the phone, so that you buy a phone which has a bar in place to block services of an inappropriate content.
- High Street stores now have for sale a new service package which enables parents to track their child's whereabouts via their mobile phone. This location tracking service would be very useful with young children who need to understand it's for safety reasons. Older children may resist the idea and feel they can not be trusted in which case it may need more discussion

What recommendations have you for my child using a mobile phone?

Remind your child that:

- Unless you know the caller never give any information out about yourself.
- Do not reply to text messages from someone you don't know
- Premium rates to enter competitions, purchase ring-tones, games etc. are expensive and these charges quickly mount up. Be careful not to agree to an ongoing service. Cancel a service number by just texting 'stop' to them.
- Always get your friend's permission if taking a photo and before sending to someone else. Remember that once a picture is sent you will have no control over it.
- Don't give out phone numbers of friends/family without their permission.
- Keep your mobile hidden when not in use to avoid theft.

- It is best for your health to keep your calls brief or use text and for your safety be aware of traffic and what is going on around you when using your phone when outside.

What can be done about mobile phone bullying?

- Text bullying can be very upsetting and children usually need the support of an adult to stop it.
- Tell your child that if someone sends nasty, rude or bullying messages they should not answer them.
- Consider saving any text or pictures sent by a bully, noting any relevant dates and times of incidents. This is a precaution in case you can't stop the bullying and need to take more formal steps with school or police.
- Changing your child's phone number and only giving the new number to family and friends can be a quick effective way to stop the contact from the bully.
- Information on dealing with bullying such as name calling, violence, mobile phone and racist abuse can be found at www.bullying.co.uk
- The National Family and Parenting Institute have worked with Vodafone to produce a new resource for parents to tackle mobile phone bullying including information about preventing inappropriate use of mobile phones. Go to www.nfpi.org to download your copy.
- For text bullying go to www.stoptextbully.com

Who can you contact if you have a concern for your child?

- If you have a concern about your child's behaviour, a bullying issue or their safety you can call PAC (Parents Advice Centre) Freephone 0808 8010 722.
Or email info@parentshelpline.org.uk