

Mobile Telephones – Advice for Parents

Modern mobiles or ‘smart phones’ are in essence small personal computers and as such can now provide great opportunities for being more connected in the digital world but can also therefore pose a risk for users to be identified or located, and send or receive images they may feel uncomfortable with.

Access the internet - this is no different to accessing the internet through a computer. Young people can go on any site that you can find online, including sites like Facebook, YouTube and also potentially age inappropriate sites.

Take and share photos and videos - most telephones have a fully functioning camera. Young people can take images and videos and these can be shared quickly, easily and for free through text messages, email or uploading to the internet.

Chat with instant messaging, video and text - young people can take part in private chats with people through their mobile telephone.

Share your location - through GPS, many telephones can now identify their user’s location in real time. This can then be shared on social networking sites and through other sites and applications.

Play games - young people can use their mobile to play games and download new ones, sometimes these can come at a cost.

Add and buy ‘apps’ - apps are programmes that you can add to your mobile that enable you to do a wide range of things, from playing simple games to finding up-to-date train times. Some of these apps have a cost.

With all of these functions available talking to people is now only a small part of what mobile telephones are used for. It can be difficult to keep tabs of what your child is up to and when they are using their mobile.

How can I help my child use their mobile phone safely?

Parental settings - some mobile telephone service providers allow you to set certain controls over your child’s phone. This can include blocking access to certain sites and monitoring your child’s activities.

Loopholes - even if you have set controls, your child may be accessing the internet through other sources. Many mobiles can access the internet through WiFi, which could be available on your street and picked up for free. Accessing someone else’s WiFi may mean that your safety settings no longer apply.

Understand what your child's telephone can do - all mobiles are different and you need to know what they are capable of so you can manage the risks.

Set a pin code on your child's telephone - Setting a pin code is like a password. Without a password, others may use your child's mobile. This could enable them to access personal information, online accounts or run up expensive bills.

Set boundaries and monitor usage - this doesn't mean spying on your child. You can set rules with them about where it is used and how long for.

Discuss what they can share - teach your child to think before they share online and the consequence of doing this over the mobile telephone, such as sharing their location. Remind them of future consequences of pictures, video clips or text messages that can be widely distributed without permission or knowledge only to re-surface embarrassingly at a later date.

Discuss and monitor costs - mobiles can be expensive. As well as bills, costs can run up through downloading apps, music or leaving data-roaming on abroad. Your child should be made aware of the financial responsibilities that comes with owning a phone.

Keep their mobile number private - young people need to understand that their telephone number should only be given to people they know and trust, make sure that if they are concerned, they ask you first.

Street safety - it is important to be extra careful when walking, running, crossing roads or riding a bike whilst using music players on mobile telephones, browsing the internet, chatting or texting.

Storing documents - many new 'smart phones' can also be used to store documents using apps turning their mobile into a 'drive'. Remind your child they should not be storing documents on their telephone that contain personal details as they would not be secure if the telephone were hacked, lost or stolen.

Keep lines of communication open with your child - ensure that they are not afraid to tell you if they have received an image, unwanted contact or are being pressurised to send inappropriate photos of themselves. Remind them to report any images they receive to yourself or an adult they can trust.

Cyberbullying

Being targeted by Cyberbullying, which is the use of mobile telephones or technology deliberately to upset someone, can be very distressing. The audience can be very large and reached rapidly. The difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages means the scale and the scope of Cyberbullying can be greater than other forms of bullying behaviours.

Cyberbullying may also involve recording/videoing events without permission and uploading them to the internet, videoing events on mobile telephones. This may also be a good discussion point with your child. By using their mobile responsibly this also helps to contribute towards being a good role model for siblings or others in online communities.

If your child received abusive calls or messages, it is important that they do not respond. They should report this to you as their parent or carer or trusted adult/teacher. It is advised they do not delete or tamper with the message or evidence so that vital evidence can be kept.

Where can I find further help or advice?

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has a section with advice for parents about online safety including computers, games consoles and mobile telephones, www.ceop.police.uk

The CEOP Report Abuse Button is a way of children finding out about how to report concerns too. It can be found at www.thinkuknow.co.uk and on many social networking sites.

General mobile telephone advice and safety www.mobilephonesandsafety.co.uk

Child International www.childnet.com has advice and guidance for parents and carers

Visit www.ofcom.org.uk for information about mobile phones, including a specific section for parents.