



Mobile Safety Strategies for Children



THE PURPOSE OF THIS SHEET is to provide parents with information on the common mobile phone activities of 10-12 year-old children, as well as ways in which you can help your child protect him/herself from exploitation and abuse.

At this age, children take great interest in having their own mobile phone, and have been exposed to mobile phone technology through television, advertising, peers, siblings, and parents. It is important to establish basic principles and guidelines regarding mobile phone use.

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Messaging to children should be developmentally-appropriate, and should parallel messages promoting safety and the Internet:

What 10-12 year-old children enjoy doing with mobile phones

- Calling friends
- Text messaging (which could include multimedia like audio or video)
- Instant messaging (IM)
- Using the phone's web browser to surf the Internet, check email, visit chatrooms, etc.
- Using the phone's web browser to download ringtones, games, wallpaper, etc.
- Taking pictures/videos of themselves/friends
- Playing games

Key messages and strategies to help children stay safe

- Monitor your child's mobile phone use
- Make sure your child always keeps his/her personal information to him/herself: passwords, PINs, name, age, address, location, etc. Let your child know that his/her service provider will never call and ask for personal information
- Make sure that your child never includes his/her name or phone number on his/her voicemail message. "Hello—I'm unable to take your call at this time. Please leave a message" is fine
- Tell your child that s/he must have your permission to share his/her mobile phone number—this includes leaving the number on online forms, contest ballots, etc. Make sure your child never shares his/her friends' phone numbers

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Key messages and strategies to help children stay safe *cont'd*

- Teach your child that replying to a voice/text message will disclose his/her mobile phone number to strangers via caller ID
- Discourage your child from answering calls from unfamiliar phone numbers—if the call is important, the caller will leave a message
- Limit the amount of time your child spends on his/her mobile phone
- Stress to your child not to leave his/her mobile phone unattended
- Learn how to block calls/messages from unwanted users on your child's mobile phone, then teach your child how to do the same
- Limit your child's downloading of ringtones, games, etc. to reputable sites (i.e. the service provider)—illicit downloads could include programs to harm or track your child's mobile phone
- Make sure the games, ringtones, and wallpapers your child is downloading are legal and age-appropriate
- Teach your child be aware of his/her surroundings rather than focusing his/her attention on the mobile phone. S/he should also be aware of others that may have a camera phone or Bluetooth technology, which could pose a potential safety hazard
- Stress that your child should never send pictures/video of him/herself from his/her mobile phone—once a picture/video has been sent, s/he loses control over it, and it can never be fully retrieved
- Ensure your child always uses a nickname in chatrooms, IM, etc. that doesn't reflect his/her age, location, or interests
- Reinforce that your child shouldn't respond to unwanted messages. Teach him/her to save any voice or text messages with malicious content, and to share them with a trusted adult
- Stress that if your child feels uncomfortable with a call or text message, explain that it's OK to turn off the phone
- Teach your child about the public nature of text messaging. What s/he texts can be shared with anyone. To avoid a potentially uncomfortable situation, stress the importance of being very careful about what s/he includes in a text message

Act as a role model for your child—make sure your actions parallel your words.

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