



Mobile Safety Strategies for Children



THE PURPOSE OF THIS SHEET is to provide parents with information on the common mobile phone activities of 13-15 year-old adolescents, as well as ways in which you can help your adolescent protect him/herself from exploitation and abuse.

At this age, many adolescents have their own mobile phones, and are typically quite familiar with mobile phone technology; it is important to reinforce basic principles and guidelines regarding mobile phone use.

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

What 13-15 year-old adolescents 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 social networking sites, etc.
- Using the phone's web browser to download ringtones, wallpaper, MP3s, and games
- Taking pictures/videos of themselves/friends
- Playing games

Key messages and strategies to help adolescents stay safe

- Monitor your adolescent's mobile phone use
- Make sure your adolescent always keeps his/her personal information to him/herself: passwords, PINs, name, age, address, location, etc. Let your adolescent know that his/her service provider will never call and ask for personal information
- Make sure that your adolescent 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 adolescent 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 adolescent never shares his/her friends' phone numbers

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

- Ensure your adolescent gets permission to meet someone for the first time, and that s/he brings a parent or a trusted friend along
- Remind your adolescent that replying to a voice/text message will disclose his/her mobile phone number to strangers via caller ID
- Discourage your adolescent from answering calls from unfamiliar phone numbers—if the call is important, the caller will leave a message
- Limit the amount of time your adolescent spends on his/her mobile phone
- Make sure your adolescent never leaves his/her mobile phone unattended
- Learn how to block calls/messages from unwanted users on your adolescent's mobile phone, then teach your adolescent how to do the same
- Limit your adolescent's downloading of ringtones, games, etc. to reputable sites (i.e. the service provider)—illicit downloads could include programs to harm or track your adolescent's mobile phone
- Make sure the games, ringtones, and wallpapers your adolescent downloads are legal and age-appropriate
- Remind your adolescent to be aware of his/her surroundings rather than focusing his/her attention on the phone. S/he should stay aware of other nearby mobile phone users that may have a camera phone or Bluetooth technology, which could pose a potential safety hazard
- Ensure your adolescent always uses a nickname in chatrooms, IM, etc. that doesn't reflect his/her age, location, or interests
- Reinforce that your adolescent 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
- Teach your adolescent to trust his/her instincts—that if s/he feels a situation is potentially unsafe, it probably is. Stress that if s/he feels uncomfortable, 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 adolescent—make sure your actions parallel your words.

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