



Questions to ask when purchasing a mobile phone



What kind of mobile phone should I get for my child?

Before committing to a particular model of mobile phone, take the time to learn what features are included on the phone. Of particular interest should be whether the phone has photo or video capability, as your child/adolescent's unsupervised use of these functions may make him/her vulnerable to manipulation or sexual exploitation. It's not possible for you to disable the camera on a mobile phone.

Have your mobile service provider/carrier show you how to disable/enable and password-protect other functions of your child/adolescent's mobile phone.

Some features may only be enabled/disabled by the carrier/service provider. Discuss these features before committing to a particular model.

What features are available?

Is the instruction manual clear? The instruction manual should provide technical assistance, while a representative from the mobile phone provider should be able to walk you through how each function works.

- Having a clear understanding of how your child/adolescent's mobile phone works, as well as having the means to password-protect, enable and disable functions, is essential to effective mobile safety for your child/adolescent.

Does the phone have Internet access?

Does the phone have a web browser? Instant messaging (e.g. Windows Messenger, AIM)? If so, can they be disabled?

- While mobile access to the Internet is extremely handy, it also presents many of the same risks as home computers connected to the Internet. Many of the same online features are available on mobile phones that are on personal computers. Parents should ask service providers whether such functions can be disabled or password-protected.

What filtering systems are available?

Does the provider offer any filtering software or components?

- Filtering software reduces the risk of spam and malicious content.

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What sort of adult controls are built into the mobile phone?

Ask the carrier/service provider if it's possible to set up your child/adolescent's mobile phone to block any potentially questionable content (adult websites/images/language, sexually explicit content, etc.).

Do you want a monthly plan (with the ability to monitor usage via monthly bills) or a prepaid arrangement (so as to cap the available amount of usage) for your child/adolescent's phone?

- The plan you choose will determine in part how closely you can monitor your child/adolescent's mobile phone use. Consider what may be more appropriate for your child/adolescent based on his/her age or developmental level.

What other technology should I be asking about?

Is your child/adolescent's phone Bluetooth-enabled?

- Bluetooth permits content to be transmitted from one Bluetooth-enabled device to another.

Are there games pre-installed on your child/adolescent's mobile phone? Is the content of these games age-appropriate? Can you play against other users over a network?

- As with games accessed on a home computer, there is potential access to sexually-explicit or violent content in mobile games. Additionally, perpetrators could take advantage of the ability to chat with children/adolescents through the mobile game interface.

Does the phone have the capacity to play videos/MP3s?

- Many of the newest phones offer the ability to play MP3 and video files either sent to them by other mobile phone users or downloaded from the Internet. As with MP3 and movie files accessed on a home computer, these have the potential of carrying violent or sexually-explicit content that may not be suitable for your child/adolescent.

What other safety issues exist?

Were you provided with an online photo album with your camera- or video-equipped phone?

- If you are using an online/virtual photo album, make sure it is set to "private" (most providers will let you share the contents of an online photo album with other users selected by you).

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If the phone is able to connect to the Internet, is it possible to block chatrooms or certain addresses?

- Chatrooms are typically unsupervised, and child offenders will often frequent them in an attempt to lure victims.

Can my child/adolescent update his/her social networking site (Facebook, MySpace)?

- Some social networking sites like Facebook include features that allow users to update their page from their mobile phone. By sending a text message to the site, an application then automatically updates the user's page; some mobile phones can upload pictures/video directly and immediately to such sites. This poses a significant safety risk, as a child/adolescent could include information visible to potential offenders about their current whereabouts.

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