

TIPS FOR SMART CELLPHONE USE

Some 95% of Americans own cellphones of some kind, according to Pew Research Center - among 18- to 29-year-olds, the number is a whopping 100%. But no matter your age, there are some basic ideas for keeping mobile phone use safe and constructive:

Share with care. Use the same good sense about what you post from your phone as from a computer. Once they're posted, text, photos, and video are tough to take back, can be copied and pasted elsewhere, and are up there pretty much forever. Think about the people in them (including you!). Reputations are at stake.

Phones are personal. Letting other people use your phone when you're not around is like letting them have the password to your social network profile. They can impersonate you, which gives them the power to mess with your reputation and relationships. Lock your phone when you're not using it, and use strong and unique passwords for all your apps.

Keep it kind. Because people socialize on cellphones as much as online, cyberbullying can be mobile too. Treat people on phones and the web the way you would in person, and the risk of being bullied goes down. Be aware, too, of people randomly taking pictures at parties, in locker rooms, etc. – you may not want to be tagged in their social-network photo albums!

Sexting: The vast majority of kids are smart and don't take, send, or post or even store nude photos of themselves or peers on their phones. People who do so can be charged with production, distribution, or possession of child pornography, a serious crime. They can also be subjected to jokes, bullying, blackmail, expulsion from school, loss of a job, etc. and the images can circulate forever. Just don't go there.

The value of presence. If you do a lot of texting, consider the impact that being "elsewhere" might be having on the people around you. Your presence during meals, at parties, in the car, etc. is not only polite, it's a sign of respect and appreciated.

Know what your apps know. Pay attention to any permissions apps request as you install them. If an app asks to access your location, contact list, calendar or messages or to post to your social networking services, consider if the app really needs that information to function. When in doubt, consider withholding permission or not using that app.

Down time is good. Constant texting and talking can affect sleep, concentration, school, and other things that deserve your thought and focus. You need your sleep, and real friends understand there are times you just need to turn off the phone.

Share location mindfully. A growing number of apps allow friends to pinpoint each other's physical location. If you use such a service, do so only with friends you know in person, and get to know the service's privacy features.

Have a conversation (not a lecture) with your kids about smartphone use. Consider drawing up a family cellphone contract and talk with your children about why each point is important (there's a sample contract at ConnectSafely.org/mobile). If you decide to use parental-control apps, discuss them with your children.

Consider parental-control tools. There are actually two major types of parental controls. The first is family rules or guidelines that you establish with your children, and the second is technology tools provided by cellphone companies, smartphone makers and app developers. If you do use technology to monitor or limit your child's phone activities, in most cases it's a good idea to be up front with them and revisit it every now and then as they mature.

Don't text or handle your phone while driving. Texting or even touching your phone while driving is dangerous and illegal in many states. If you must speak on the phone, use a speaker or headset and hands-free controls. Never text, send or read email or post online and if you use your phone for navigation or listening to music or podcasts, set it before you leave or use hands-free voice recognition.