

## Talk To Your Kids About Cell Phone Use

There has been a lot of talk about mobile phone safety & there is reason to be concerned. *Mobile phones in Japan & Europe have been linked to harassment & sexual exploitation of both children & adults.*

### Talk to Your Kids

If you are a parent, you should talk to your children about protecting themselves from exploitation, bullying & invasion of privacy as well as an out of control phone bill.

The Yankee Group estimates 1/3 of US children ages 10 to 19 already have cell phones, but their ranks will grow to 2/3 by 2005. If Japan is any indication, that could be underestimated. Already more than 80% of Japanese high school students and 25% of junior high students have cell phones. Cell phones are also extremely popular with kids in Europe. The majority of Britain's 7 – 16 yr olds have cell phones as do 75% of teens in Scandinavia.

A 2003 conference I attended opened my eyes to both the possibilities & dangers inherent with kid's use of cell phones. A cell phone can be a great communications & safety tool. In addition to keeping up with friends, kids can check in with parents, respond to parent's calls & phone for help in an emergency.

### Putting the World in Children's Hands.

When you put a cell phone in a child's hands you are giving them access to the world and the world access to them, including when they are away from home & parental supervision. Today's cell phones are not just mobile telephones, they're also Web Browsers, instant messengers & e-mail terminals. Most companies now offer phones with colour displays, built-in digital cameras, the ability to transmit photos from phone to phone, via e-mail or to web sites and record moving video. In other words, just about everything you can do on a PC, you can do on a cell phone. The Japanese Cabinet Office surveyed teen use of cell phones & discovered that 30% of females & 37% of males under 20 have accessed "dating sites", which in some cases have led girls & women to unwanted sexual encounters with men who expected more than just a "date". A colour screen means that your child can look at the same type of graphic content available on the "fixed" internet at home. A built-in camera means that your child can not only see inappropriate material, but can send it as well. Pushing a few buttons can send a child's image, phone number and mobile e-address to the wrong person. Predators cannot only send kids messages, but they can also call them to arrange meetings. Because kids can access the phone when they are away from home, they are particularly vulnerable as they are out of their parent's reach. Predators will contact kids on their cell phones.

### Bullies Packing Cell Phones.

When you call or send someone a text message you are sending them your cell phone number which they can then use to make harassing calls and send unwanted instant messages & e-mail. It's not uncommon for bullies to use cell phones to harass kids. Bullying by cell phone is becoming a major problem in the United Kingdom. A survey by National Children's Homes found that "mobile phones appear to be the most commonly abused medium with 16% of young people saying they received bullying or threatened text messages, followed by 7% who have been harassed in internet chat rooms and 4% by e-mail. *If your child is being harassed in this way, call your provider to see about getting the number changed.*

### Costs

Kids can easily run up costs in excess of \$100 per month. Make sure you & your child know when free nights and weekends begin. Some plans don't start until after 9PM. Also be aware that text messaging is charged by both in & outgoing texting & there are extra charges for web access, downloading games, screen savers and ring tones. A good plan is to have pre-paid service. When they are out of money, service stops other than to call 911.

### Talk with your kids about using their phone responsibly.

*Adapted from Talk to Your kids about Cell Phone Use by Larry Magid 2004 @ SafeKids.com*