

Talking to Your Kids about Cell Phones

Whether your child wants a cell phone or already has one, it's important to keep talking about how to use it well. With the rapid pace of technology change, it's easy for kids to discover all kinds of ways to use cell phones that parents never dreamed of.

- Ask your child how he uses a cell phone (and how other kids use their phones). Teenagers may be more likely to tell you what other kids are doing (instead of what they're doing). Keep the conversation going.
- Talk about the situations kids may encounter when they have a cell phone. Some kids play pranks on each other's cell phones (such as reprogramming it in Chinese). Middle-school kids are notorious for kidnapping cell phones and using up all the monthly minutes as a joke, which is not funny for the actual user.
- Just because your child has a cell phone doesn't mean that you know where your child is (or that you'll be able to get a hold of him). The batteries can run out. Kids can call and say they're at the library when they're actually at a friend's house. Cell phones are not foolproof. Talk about the importance of honesty.
- Review your monthly cell phone bill with your child. Make sure the expenses are what you had both planned on. If not, help your child use the cell phone differently. Figure out ways for her to pay you back for any overages. Then see if you can monitor the phone bill online twice a week until you're certain you won't encounter any more surprises.
- Talk to your child about cell phone manners. While cell phones are great connectors for "out-of-sight" people, kids need to learn not to be rude to people sitting right next to them.
- Encourage your child to only talk to people she knows in person. For more tips on talking to your child, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics' Talking to Kids and Teens about Social Media and Sexting at <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/june09socialmedia.htm>.

With all of the other things that you need to talk to your child about—school, parties, relationships, and so on—talking about cell phones may seem like a low priority. You may change your mind, however, if you find out that your child has been using his cell phone inappropriately or that your phone bill is several hundred dollars. Take the time to talk before this happens.