



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
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More and more children have their own cell phones. A recent Pew Research Center report shows that 89 percent of American families own multiple cell phones, and 57 percent of the children ages 7 to 17 in those families have their own phones. Research by Nielsen indicates that 35 percent of kids between the ages of 8 and 12 have a cell phone.

Cell phones have the advantage of allowing greater contact between parents and children, but can present problems as well. Over-usage, unsafe usage, and simply distraction from time that might be better spent in other meaningful pursuits, such as family activities, are just a few of the problems.

The age at which a child should have a cell phone depends on personal circumstances. For example, children who divide time between the homes of divorced parents may benefit from access to a cell phone with which to maintain family contact. Parents can make cell phones appropriate for younger children by allowing access to only certain numbers.

Phones are available with parental controls, such as the ability to block Internet access or texting. Plans with prepaid minutes limit phone time and the number of text messages. Plans are also available with image-blocking safeguards. Parents should consider these options when selecting a cell phone for their child.

For those families that decide to allow their children to have cell phones, it is important to set some basic ground rules, especially for those under age 16.

- Establish specific rules about how and when the phone will be used. Set consequences for misuse of phone privileges. Monitor usage and always carry through with consequences.
- No cell phone use while driving. This includes texting. If there are extenuating circumstances, teens should pull over and park safely before using the phone.
- Allow cell phone use away from home to contact parents at any time, but for home usage establish a curfew. “The cell phone must be turned off at 8:00 p.m.” or whatever time you decide on.
- To prevent after-hours use, require that cell phones be charged on the kitchen counter overnight.
- Discuss other times when phones must be turned off, such as during meals and family activities.
- Go over phone bills with your child and discuss usage. Your teen should contribute to the cost in some way, either through payment or extra chores.
- Monitor your child's contact list to ensure there is no communication between people you do not know or approve of. Do not hesitate to review messages if you have concerns.
- Teach phone manners, such as turning off phones when rings will disturb others and taking calls that interrupt family conversations.
- Have an open discussion about sexting (sending sexually explicit material) and why it is forbidden, including legal penalties. Discuss what children should do if they receive inappropriate messages.

- Most important—set a good example. For example, if you kids observe you texting while driving, they will see nothing wrong with doing it themselves.

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