

Does your child need a mobile phone?

Information from Family Lives



Listening, supportive and non-judgemental

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/primary/health-and-development/does-your-child-need-a-mobile-phone/>



When most of us were children mobile phones didn't even exist, so it can feel quite alien to us when our children feel the need to have one. The ever growing market has tapped into the technology-thirsty young generation and there are even mobile phones for four year olds!

Family Lives recognises that giving your child a mobile phone can be a difficult decision. On the one hand you want to be able to keep in touch with them and know they are safe, whilst on the other you might have concerns about what type of content they could be trying to access, or inadvertently accessing. It can be a fraught time, but with the correct up to date information we hope that it will make it easier for you to make an informed decision. We have put together some top tips for parents of children, pre-teens and teenagers to make things a little easier.

Does your child need a mobile phone?

As a parent ask yourself whether your child really needs a mobile phone, and whether you feel they would be capable of using one in an emergency. If you are getting a phone, pick one you feel your child can manage. There is no point in having an "all singing all dancing" phone if they aren't going to be able to work it.

Many separated parents could see the positives of keeping in touch through the mobile phone, whether it was the non-resident parent who could send texts or call the child directly, or the

resident parent who felt reassured that their child could keep in touch during contact if they needed to. Some parents liked the idea their child had a safety net and could get in touch easily if they didn't feel safe at times such as walking home from school or on the school bus.

The ever growing market has tapped into the technology-thirsty young generation and there are even mobile phones for four year olds! So when you start to get pestered for the latest all singing all dancing mobile phone, what pros and cons should you consider and what do other parents think is the 'right' age to say yes?

What parents should consider when their child asks for a mobile phone

- What would it cost them, not only for the first pay out but all the credit too?
- What would their children use it for?
- Would it be a distraction – were their children trying to be too grown-up? Would they be on their phone constantly which would cause arguments at meals or bedtime or when they were supposed to be doing their homework?

Many separated parents could see the positives of keeping in touch through the mobile phone, whether it was the non-resident parent who could send texts or call the child directly, or the resident parent who felt reassured that their child could keep in touch during contact if they needed to. Some parents liked the idea their child had a safety net and could get in touch easily if they didn't feel safe at times such as walking home from school or on the school bus.

Some parents worried that this could be another way the bullies could get to their child, but that mobiles could make their child feel more safe knowing they could phone a parent or adult if they didn't feel safe.

- Some parents didn't want their children to feel left out if all their friends had phones and they were the only one who didn't.

Setting the boundaries

Make sure your children understand the rules. If they are small you can program in the numbers that they will need so that it will display who is calling them.

Tell them not to answer calls from numbers that they don't recognise.

Make rules for time spent talking on the phone so you won't be surprised by an astronomical phone bill. Check this regularly so you know that they are keeping to the boundaries. Most schools ban mobile phones in the classroom and will confiscate them if found. Make sure your child is aware of the rules and the consequences.

You can ban the mobile phone in the bedroom and can turn off the wifi at night

Research shows us that children or adults do not sleep as soundly if the mobile is sitting by the bed as we are always listening out for that text or phone ring – which makes us tired and less able to concentrate. Ban the mobile phone at other times such as meal times, or when they are supposed to be doing their homework. The phone has to be switched off or put in another room. This will save arguments and nagging at a later date if the rules are set beforehand.

Before you go out to buy the phone set a price and what you are willing to pay for credit each week/month so that you help to manage their expectations and they won't come pestering you

for more credit if they use it all up in a short space of time. Don't get trapped into paying out lots more as your child plays the old, 'I need more credit in case of an emergency' line! Be clear with your child that if they lend their phone to a friend, give it away or swap it you won't replace it so they understand the phone is their responsibility

Mobile phones for tweens

Ensure that you have a suitable plan for your tween including appropriate talk time and text limits. Although a lot of companies offer unlimited texting think about whether this might encourage your tween to use it at inappropriate times.

Talk to them about extra costs that might be incurred if they use the internet etc. which may not be included in their contract, as these can soon add up. Of course mistakes do happen but if there is an on-going problem then do speak to your phone provider to see if you can put a limit on their phone, or if you feel it is appropriate put a block on the phone.

Make sure that they understand when it is appropriate for them to use their phones. Some schools have a complete ban on use of mobiles so this could include no use in the classroom, the dinner table or after lights out.

Ensure that your teen understands that sending explicit photos or engaging in sexual texts is not appropriate and could get them into all sorts of problems. They need to prove to you that they can be responsible. If you have doubts monitor the situation and let them know that you will be checking as and when you see fit.

Talk to them about cyber bullying so they understand what this means. Encourage them to talk to an adult if they have concerns about this.

Ensure they know that there will be real consequences if they violate your boundaries and if necessary remove the phone for a reasonable length of time.

So what's new?

New areas of concern are so called "Adhoc" wifi that would allow a person with an unblocked phone to make their internet connection available to their friends' handsets like iPod touch or iPads which may not have a built in internet connection, only wifi. A parent may feel their child is fine as they have to use the home wifi connection but away from the home they could connect to a friend's Adhoc or other open or unsecured networks they find.

Parents should ensure that children know exactly what is expected of them in this regard. Ensure that they understand that connecting to the home wifi is allowed, but any other sources can only be accessed with permission or as you consider appropriate.

Children do make mistakes so if things go wrong or they come across something that makes them feel uncomfortable, try to encourage them to talk to you about it. If it's a delicate subject and talking would be too intense let them know that they can always write you a letter. This might help to take the pressure off but will keep communication lines open.

How we can help you

If you would like support and advice, you can talk to one of our Family Support Workers by calling our confidential helpline on [0808 800 2222](tel:08088002222). You can also share experiences and advice with other parents on our [Forums](#).

Family Lives is here for you and you can contact us about any family issue, big or small.



Watch our videos for hints and tips on parenting



National Offenders' Families Helpline, supporting families across England, Wales and Scotland



Parenting UK, part of Family Lives is a national membership organisation for professionals working with parents.



Action for Prisoners' and Offenders' Families, part of Family Lives, supports all those working with families of prisoners



Workshops to prevent sexual bullying, peer on peer sexual exploitation and promote positive gender relationships



Advice on all aspects of bullying



Watch our videos for hints and tips on parenting



National Offenders' Families Helpline, supporting families across England, Wales and Scotland