

# TEENS MATTER

## A PARENTING TEENS DIGEST

Boone County Step Ahead Council

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*Happy New Year to all of you. Everyone on the Step Ahead Council wishes you and your friends and family a healthy, happy and prosperous 2005. We hope that you will enjoy and find useful the information from articles printed in the months to come.*

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### INFORM YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE HAZARDS OF CELL PHONE USE

Taken from an article by Larry Magid on [Safekids.com](http://Safekids.com)

As with most technology today, things are getting more advanced as each day goes by. Computers, cameras, PDA's and cell phone are just a few examples. Cell phones are no longer used to "just make a call". New features are added everyday and with these new additions come new problems. As a parent you should talk with your children about how to protect themselves from exploitation, bullying and invasion of privacy as well as an out-of-control phone bill. A great deal of talk about mobile phone safety has largely focused on distraction while driving as well as the possibility that cell phone use might cause health problems. As if parent/guardians don't have enough to worry about there are now reports that mobile phones in some foreign countries have been linked to harassment and sexual exploitation of both children and adults.

When cell phones were first introduced, they were expensive status symbols, used mostly by successful business people. Now almost everyone can find a plan that suits his/her

needs. The Yankee Group estimates that a third of U.S. children age 10 to 19 already have cell phones, and their ranks will grow to two-thirds in 2005.

Cell phones, on the up side, are a great communication and safety tool. Not only can kids keep in touch with their friends, but check in with parents, respond to their parents calls and phone for help in case of an emergency. But along with the good there is always the bad. When you put a cell phone in children's hands you give them access to the world and the world access to them, including when they are away from home and parental supervision. What's more, today's cell phones are not just mobile telephones, they're also Web browsers, instant messenger and e-mail terminals. In other words, just about everything you can do from an Internet connected PC, you can also do from a cell phone. Dating sites can be accessed which, in some cases, can lure girls and women into unwanted encounters. The same thing that can be encountered on the home computer can now be encountered through the cell phone.

Until recently most of the problems were related to "texting," but this is changing. Most companies now offer phones with color displays, built-in digital cameras and the ability to instantly transmit photos from phone to phone, via e-mail or to a Web site. There are also phones that can record moving video. Cell phone companies are also starting to roll out their higher-speed third-generation (3G) networks, which make it practical to download graphics, photographs and video along with sound and text.

A color screen means that your child can look at the same type of graphic content available on the Internet at home. A built-in digital camera means that your child cannot only see inappropriate material, but can send it as well. Not only kids but also adults need to be extremely careful about the way they use this

new technology, especially when sharing digital photos or movies. Pushing a few telephone buttons can send a child's image, phone number and mobile e-mail address to the wrong person. It is even possible to instantly post photos on the Web for all to see. You can understand why some gyms have banned cell phones in the locker rooms because of concerns about inappropriate photographs.

Predators now cannot only send kids messages, but they can also call them to arrange meetings. Because kids can access the phone while they're away from home, they are particularly vulnerable because they are out of their parents reach. Predators can groom a child on the Internet and then contact that child via cell phone to arrange a face-to-face meeting.

The user of a cell phone is not necessarily anonymous. Although it can be disabled, most cell phones have caller ID on by default. That means that when you call or send a text message to someone, you are giving that person your phone number, which can be used to make harassing calls as well as to send unwanted instant messages and e-mail. It is not uncommon for bullies to use cell phones to harass other kids. If your child experiences harassing phone calls or text messages, or any of the other mentioned problems, you can call the provider to see about getting the number changed. Once this has been done though, you need to guard that new number so that you will not experience a repeat of the problem.

If all of this weren't enough, the FCC has created another potential problem. They have mandated that phones be equipped with "geo" locations systems designed to make it possible for others to pinpoint exactly where the phone is located. While this is a crucial piece of information for use by 911 operators to locate cell phone callers in case of an emergency, there are also planned commercial uses of this technology to allow businesses to offer location-based products and services to cell phone users. While privacy safeguards will be built in, they can also be defeated. As these services become available, children and adults need to learn how to control them so that they aren't used for the wrong purposes.

## **FINALLY "*the bill*"**

If not careful, kids can easily spend \$100 or more a month on cell plan fees. Some have free nights and weekends, but make sure your child knows the company's definition of "night", which sometimes starts as late as 9 p.m. Also, there is typically a charge for both incoming and outgoing text messages.

Downloading games, screen saver and ring tones can also add dollars.

One way to control costs is to get kids a pre-paid service. When they are out of money, their phone stops working other than for them to call 911. Check with providers about "bucket" of minutes or other plans they may offer. The best way, of course, is to talk with your kids about their responsibility of having a cell phone and the trust that you put in their hands. Just remember that the phone can be taken away at anytime until you feel that your child has matured enough to accept this responsibility and make wise decisions.

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## **JUST A REMINDER**

(As though we would let you forget)



February 14<sup>th</sup> is St. Valentine's Day. Even though this day is the one designated *commercial* day to show you care for someone, it should be the first day for the rest of the year to let the people in your life know how much you care about them and how important they are in your life. With all of the things going on in the world today our family and friends need to know how much we value them. Even though you may get a 'look' or red face from your kids... they really like to hear the words.... I LOVE YOU...