

MOBILE *Safety*



When it comes to mobiles for kids, safety should be a parent's first call.

By Ross Monaghan

Mobile phones have quickly become part of everyday life.

It's never been easier to keep in touch with family and friends. Keeping up-to-date with the latest mobile phone technology, however, is another matter.

There are several competing networks, varying price options, and handsets come with different features such as video, web browsing and games.

It's important for parents to understand what is available so they can ensure their family has the most appropriate, safest, and cost effective mobile handsets and contracts.

According to Chris Althaus, from the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) between 80 and 90 per cent of secondary school students use, or have access to, a mobile phone.

Most young people say they have a mobile phone for the convenience of being contactable almost anywhere, or for the security of being able to contact their family.

But many of today's mobile phones are more like hand-held computers than a traditional telephone.

New mobile phone features, together with the fast download speeds of the latest networks, mean that we are going to be increasingly reliant on mobile technology, even at school.

"Increasingly the education environment is going to be using mobile services," Mr Althaus says.

"Schools will be using social media tools to allow, for example, downloading podcasts of lectures or classes."

Young people already use social media such as MySpace and YouTube on their home PCs to connect with family and meet new friends around the world. New mobile phone features allow the same thing on the move.

There are advantages of having mobile access to the Internet but there are also dangers. Mobile access, for example, makes supervision more difficult and content filters are not readily available for handsets.

Your mobile phone service provider may be able to help you limit access to some services, but thinking about these issues before you buy a phone is the way to go.

Buying a mobile

If you've decided that a mobile phone might help your family stay in touch, there are a few issues you might like to consider.

Is the phone going to "belong" to one family member, or would a "family phone" work just as well?

Older teens may need their own phone, but if you have more than one young family member who may need a mobile phone occasionally, you might like to consider the benefits of a shared phone.

Where can the phone be used, and where can't it be used?

Many schools, libraries, sporting clubs and other venues such as swimming pools and gyms, have specific rules relating to the use of mobile phones. It's best to make sure it can be used where intended.

Do you really need all the latest features?

If you want the phone primarily to keep in touch, think twice about features such as cameras, and multimedia that will add to the purchase price and cost more to use. Phones with the latest technology may be a status symbol, but might also make the phone more likely to be the target of thieves.

TIP: To avoid possible pressure by sales staff and your child, agree on the features needed before you go shopping.

Fixed-term or prepaid account?

Whilst fixed-term contracts often provide cheaper call rates, prepaid accounts help you limit the amount of money you spend each month.

TIP: Only people over 18 can legally sign a contract. Think carefully before agreeing to sign a contract for your child's phone, doing so is similar to giving them your credit card. You may be held liable for all the costs and any ongoing costs if the phone is lost, stolen or damaged.

Playing it safe with your mobile

Parents often buy a mobile for their children for peace of mind. Remember though that there are a range of issues you need to

consider, discuss and agree upon to ensure everyone stays safe and happy.

As a parent, don't let the fact that your child has a mobile phone lull you in to letting your child get in situations that you otherwise wouldn't allow. Phones can be lost, stolen, out of credit, or out of range (although 000 can always be used if the phone is in a coverage area). At busy times, for example at the end of a concert, networks can be congested, and it may be difficult to immediately get a line in or out.

Agree on acceptable use and set a budget. Perhaps use the experience as a way to help teach your child about managing money.

Downloading ringtones, games, voting, entering competitions and other "premium" services, whilst fun, can be extremely expensive and sometimes have high ongoing charges.

Phone locks

Get to know the security features and locks on your mobile phone so that if it is lost, you have the best chance of getting it back and not having to pay for someone else's calls. If your handset is lost or stolen, you should immediately contact your service provider.

Bullying

Bullies can use mobile phones to make threatening calls or send harassing messages. Research suggests that this type of bullying is just as stressful to the victim as physical bullying. Mr Althaus points out that prevention is better than cure. He suggests young people should be careful when giving out their number or leaving it where the number can be seen.

"You should also consider using ID blocking when calling someone," Mr Althaus says.

If you are bullied, AMTA suggests you don't respond, consider turning off your phone when you don't need it on, and consider getting help. Remember the law is on your side.

More information

www.understandingmoney.gov.au

www.cybersmartkids.com.au

www.acma.gov.au

Australian Mobile
Telecommunications Association

www.amta.org.au

SMS Lingo

BBL Be back Later

BFN Bye for now

CUL8R See later

F2F Face To Face

IOH I'm Out of Here

OMG Oh My God

POTS Plain Old Telephone Service

POS Parents are looking Over my Shoulder.

POTS Parents Over The Shoulder - (My parents are watching, I can't really talk)

ROFL Rolling On The Floor, Laughing

TYT Take Your Time

YW You're Welcome