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# Internet Safety Newsletter from ChildrenOnline.org

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**Welcome to the third edition of our Children Online newsletter.**

The fall is just around the corner and for many of us who have children and/or teach children, life gets very busy! Students of all ages will be heading off to school with a backpack and cell phone. What is meant for parents to be a communication device is seen as a toy for kids. Cell phones are not just for talking. Most cell phones on the market today have chat functions, internet access, games, text messaging and act as alarm clocks, rolodex, calendars and in some cases MP3 players. This newsletter will share some ways to help kids make healthy decisions regarding the use of cell phones.

Happy Reading,

Doug Fodeman and Marje Monroe

**CELL PHONES**

**Know the functions on your child's phone.**

Understand your child's phone and be clear with your child about the use of the phone. Talk to the cell provider about what you need and be proactive before buying a phone with features that you may not want your child to have.

**For younger children, disconnect non-essential phone functions**

Young children (to age 14) do not need internet access, instant chat functions or text messaging functions. Allow them time at home where their use is structured and supervised. Keep in mind that scammers and spammers are targeting children via their cell phones today.

**What can parents do about fraudulent charges?**

1. Read your cell phone bills carefully and don't hesitate to dispute charges you believe are for unrequested services.
2. Contact your Attorney General's Office, Better Business Bureau and complain.
3. Contact your cell provider and have them remove the text messaging feature. Do not take "not possible" for an answer. It is possible!
4. Contact your cell provider and ask them to put a "purchase blocker" on the phone number which requires you to enter a PIN number to bypass and make purchases.

**Learn about the marketing scams directed toward cell phones**

Parents often get hit with very high bills that are directly related to text messaging. Kids may download jokes, ring tones, and video feeds not realizing the very high price tag attached. See below and [www.childrenonline.org](http://www.childrenonline.org) ("In the News" links for more information and resources on cell phone scams.)

**Talk to your child's school about cell phone rules and regulations**

Most schools have rules and restrictions for cell phone use. Talk to the principal, Dean or your child's advisor for a list of rules.

**Have frequent conversations with your child**

Much of our children's life on the cell phone is spent in isolation. Ask your child who they are talking to or visiting with on the phone and online. Take interest in their life and connections.

**Teach your child to communicate responsibly**

Many text messages are insulting, mean or harassing. Talk to your children about responsibility, kindness and respect.

**Does your child need a cell phone?**

Today, most parents want the comfort, security and ease of family cell phones. Cell phones allow immediate access to family, friends and most importantly to help when it is needed. As parents make decisions about cell phones, consider your child's age. Young children who are supervised by parents, schools, sitters or family friend's are not likely to need a phone for safety or instant access to an adult.

Young teens to age 14 will beg for a phone with all the gadgets. Let's face it, they are fun! However, at this age, while a cell phone may be important for emergencies or immediate access to family, your child's cell should not include text messaging, games or internet access. Talk to your cell provider for options.

Older teens may be able to make healthy choices regarding text messaging. Make decisions as a family about the functions on your child's phone. Be careful about letting them purchase their own service.

**Text Messaging**

Text Messaging is an amazing feature available on today's phones. Kids and adults are able to text back and forth very quickly to friends or peers. Rather than talk to someone they can send a quick text message such as "meet you at home" or "call me". While this can be a helpful feature, it often is used by kids for bullying or harassment. More and more students are being caught cheating by texting to one another during a test or accessing the internet on their phone to find an answer to a tough question.

Just as the internet has spawned many marketing scams directed at children and teens, the cell phone is no different. Sign up for a cool ring tone or graphic and children may also receive pornographic material or a very high charge. It is important for parents and families to educate their kids of the risks and financial realities of text messaging.

Scammers are advertising heavily on web sites frequented by teens and tweens. Teach your children to avoid "Free Ringtone" offers. The great majority are not free at all but incur hidden charges. Younger children with cell phones are targeted via cable television advertising. Many advertisers by-pass the required "double opt-in" process and simply allow a child to subscribe to expensive services without a parent's knowledge. Look for hidden charges on your cell phone bill such as "data", "download" and "premium services" without any additional explanation. Don't always assume that your child has subscribed to these services. Some of them target cell phone users with confusing text messages about signing up. Clicking CANCEL may even result in a subscription! For many consumer stories about fraudulent cell phone charges, visit

[www.jamsterscam.com](http://www.jamsterscam.com). Several companies most often accused of fraudulent third-party billing on cell phone bills include Jamster, Blinko, M-Qube, Buongiorno, MBlox, DadaMobile and Thumbplay.

**CELL PHONE SUBSCRIPTION CODES: Who's really at the other end?**

**Multi-tasking and teens**

In today's world, young people are used to doing many things at one time. It is not unusual to see kids watching TV, talking on their cell phone and busily chatting with friends online. Teens have grown amazingly efficient

Advertisers and marketers on Cable television channels such as Nickelodeon and popular web sites entice teens and tweens to subscribe to the "joke of the day" or to get "free" ringtones simply by entering a 4-5 digit code into their cell phone text messaging service. On television the fine print is so small and flashes on the screen so briefly that most adults wouldn't see the costs incurred or subscription fees.

Wondering who these marketers really are? Visit the [U.S. Common Shortcode WHOIS Directory](#). Find out if "52844" is the Weather Channel or Jokes and pickup lines. (It is the latter.)

Send us your questions. Email questions to [DFodeman@Brookwood.edu](mailto:DFodeman@Brookwood.edu)



**COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES:**

1. How to protect the family computer
2. You've made a mistake in giving your child certain internet privileges. What is the best language to use with your child to change your rules?

at texting on their phones while talking with parents, studying or even driving. It is important for parents to create healthy and safe policies around cell phones. Do not allow the use of cell phones while driving and limit cell phone use during family time at home.

Adults continue to think of cell phones as just a phone but to teens and tweens they are much more.

Thank you for your continued interest. We value your input. If you like what you see, please pass this newsletter on to a friend.

**Sincerely,**

Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman  
Children Online

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