



# CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

## Cell phone safety for children

Article courtesy of [FaithandSafety.org](http://FaithandSafety.org)

When and if a child should get a cell phone is ultimately a parental decision. Children want cell phones for games and social communication. Parents want their children to have a cell phone for safety. When you give your child a cell phone, you are giving them a portable computer with mobile Internet capability. Know a phone's features and capabilities before you purchase. It's important to discuss issues of privacy, inappropriate texts/photos, and safety. For parents wanting extra safety features, there are special phones designed just for children.

It's a fact: just about everyone in America has a cell phone. There are now more activated cell phones than there are people in the United States. Children are no exception. The average age for a child's first cell phone is just over 11 years old; 77% of children ages 12-17 have a cell phone. Cell phones are the primary form of communication for teens; and they send more texts in a month than they do phone calls. With statistics like that, cell phones need to be a primary focus for safety.

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## Social Networking Safety: Tips for Parents

Article courtesy of the [National Crime Prevention Council | www.ncpc.org](http://National Crime Prevention Council | www.ncpc.org)

They love it! And oftentimes it seems that they can't live without it. The rise of social networking sites has teens throughout the United States fanatical about these addictive websites. Social networking is a platform of online sites that focuses on building relationships among people who may share the same interest or activities. It provides a way for users to interact over the Internet. Users are often identified by their profiles, which can consist of photos and basic information, such as location, likes and dislikes, as well as friends and family. Well-known sites such as Facebook have taken social networking to a new level. In addition to the convenience of being able to access these websites from a computer, there are also applications on mobile devices that make it easy to access social applications anywhere and anytime.

As a parent, you want to make sure your child is safe when he or she is engaged in social networking. You may find it chal-

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## Why do children want a cell phone?

Try Googling the question, “Why do children want a cell phone?” Guess what? You won’t find the answer! Instead, you’ll be presented with countless sites giving you advice on whether or not your child *needs* a cell phone. That’s not the same thing! For younger children, cell phones are cool. Older children have them and cell phones are a gateway to get cool games, movies, and music. For older children, much of their social world now exists through digital communications. Talking, texting, IM, email, video messages, and social media are all part of this reality. This is how their friends are communicating. Your children will want to be part of that social circle too. It’s critically important that you understand this dynamic. The point here is simple: the reasons why your child wants a cell phone are probably not the same reasons why you want to give them a cell phone. Don’t avoid this communication gap. Talk about it with your children so that you can both understand each other better and communicate your mutual expectations. A common way to communicate expectations is through a “Responsible Cell Phone Use” contract. There are many available online. An example: <http://www.connectsafely.org/family-contract-smart-phone-use/>

## Cell Phone Safety Topics to Discuss with your Children

Giving a child or teen-ager a cell phone can open up a host of additional behaviors because today’s phones allow you to do so many different things. Before you give your



child a cell phone, it’s important to discuss the following topics depending on your child’s age:

**Distracted driving:** Distracted driving can be deadly. Teens who drive should understand that texting, answering email, surfing the web, or any other cell-phone activity can cause a deadly accident. If they need to use a cell phone, teach them to pull over.

**Cheating:** Cheating in class isn’t just copying and passing notes any more. Cell phones are used to cheat in school. Openly talk to your children about the ethics of cheating and the temptation a cell phone could present.

**Sexting:** Sexting is sending a sexually explicit text, photo, or video via text messaging. Sexted photos or videos are frequently shared and don’t stay solely with the intended recipient. A kid’s reputation can be damaged for life. Peer pressure can lead to sexting. Talk to children about the dangers of sexting, peer pressure and to immediately report any sexting.

**Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying is bullying with electronic media—cell phones included. Children can be both victims and bullies. Talk to children about what to do if they are bullied and remind them not to bully others.

**Geolocation:** Geolocation uses your cell phone to determine your exact location in real-time. Approximately 18% of adult cell phone users use geosocial services to “check-in” to places. Children thirteen and under should never use geolocation services to reveal their current location. Teach children about appropriate and inappropriate uses of these services and how they can invite predators and compromise your family’s safety and security.

## When Should I get my Child a Cell Phone?

In case you are wondering, there is no “best age” for when a child should get a cell phone. That is ultimately a parenting decision and depends upon each family’s particular needs and circumstances.

Common Sense Media has put together the following questions to help you work through that tough parenting decision. If you can answer “yes” to most of these questions, then it just may be time to consider

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lenging to keep up with the ever-changing technology. You may also feel like your child is much more Internet savvy than you are, and, in fact, that may be true. But as savvy as your teen may be, he or she may not be aware of the dangers of online networking and what precautions he or she should take to stay safe. It is time to talk to your teen about social networking safety.

Familiarizing yourself with the basic terminology that is used on most social networking sites will help you communicate effectively with your teen about the topic.

**Post** - A message that can be updated to notify your selected followers of what you are doing or thinking.

**Tagging** - To label friends in a photo and link to their profile pages. If tagged, you’re

notified so that you can de-tag or stay linked to the comment, video, or photo

**Wall** - Area on your profile where friends can post their current locations, comments, pictures, or links.

**Places** - This feature allows a user to post his or her current location. This information is then shared with all of the user’s followers.

**Friend Request** - A person interested in being a friend will send a request, which can either be accepted or denied.

**Blocking** - Prevents another user from searching and viewing your profile; you can ban access temporarily or permanently.

**Hacker** - Someone who breaks into computers or computer networks and accesses a profile user’s information to get money or to break into other personal accounts. Some

may also create false profiles or pose as another user.

## The four major dangers of using social networking websites are: Over sharing information:

When creating a profile page, most websites will ask for personal information such as home addresses, birthdays, and phone numbers. Giving this information can be very dangerous and will be made public to anyone who visits a user’s profile page, especially if privacy settings are not set correctly. Even if account settings are set to private, users are still at risk of their accounts being hacked. If someone hacks into an account he or she will be able to view and use the information. Sharing simple things like

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your favorite color can tip off a hacker to try to see if you used that as a password on your account. The biggest threat of over sharing information is identity theft. Identity theft is not uncommon in the world of online social networking. Online computer criminals look to steal identities in obvious and not so obvious ways. An obvious way would be someone asking for your social security number. A not so obvious way is luring a user to click on a link that will allow the criminal to download all of the user's personal information. The anonymity provided online makes it easier for computer criminals to go undetected.

**He's not who you think he is:**

Social networking sites make it very easy to pretend to be someone else. Even if an individual may be friends with someone on the site, anyone can take control of a user's account if he or she can obtain the user's password. As a result, someone who is a "Friend" can ask for money or gain personal information that can be used to hack into other accounts. For example, you may get a message from a relative asking you for your banking information because he or she would like to wire you some money for your birthday. You may think you're talking to your relative, but in fact the information is being requested by someone who has hacked into your relative's account.

**Location-based services:**

Location-based services can be one of the most dangerous features provided by social networking sites. They expose the profile user's location and whereabouts. The service also has a feature that allows users to tag who they are with at any given time. While it can be fun to share your location with friends and family, it can also increase your vulnerability, potentially opening you up to being robbed, sexually assaulted, or



worse. Predators can use this tool to track your movements and determine when you are alone or when you are not at home.

**Posting photos:**

One of the features of online social networking that many teens enjoy is the photo-sharing feature. This feature allows you to post photos 24 hours a day. Whether it is from your computer or mobile device, posting photos can be done in seconds. The Internet makes it easy to obtain photos and use the images in any way a person may choose. Posting inappropriate photos that may be deemed as fun, cute, or sexy, can end up where one least expects it. Photo tampering is a big threat when it comes to posting photos online. The use of photo editing tools allows people to manipulate online images in any way they choose, whether it's used for good or bad purposes. While posting pictures and sharing them with friends can be fun, it can also be risky

**Teaching Your Teen Simple Steps To Increase Safety**

**Don't give optional information:**

When creating a profile, you do not need to enter all of the information that is requested. The set-up page usually requires you to fill out basic information, such as your name and email. Everything else is optional. Do not feel obligated to put your address and telephone number.

**Use the highest level of privacy:**

There are three levels of privacy set-

tings to choose from for your profile. There is "open to everyone," "open to friends of friends" and "friends only." The best setting to use is the "friends only" setting on all of your privacy choices. "Friends only" is the strictest level of security; it only allows people that you have accepted as a friend to view information about you.

**Accept only people you know:**

Accepting only people you know and trust is a great way to ensure safety when using social networking sites. Doing this can protect you from spammers, pedophiles, and other people who use social networking sites to commit crimes.

**"Think Before They Post"**

When discussing social networking safety with your child, encourage him or her to always use discretion when posting any type of photo, location status, and message. Tell your teen to ask him or herself these four questions before posting to the world:

*Should I share this?* Will the information you share put yourself or someone else in danger?

*Do people really need to know where I am and who I am with? Is it a good idea to let everyone know my exact location?*

*Am I selecting friends online that I can trust?* Always keep in mind that it's not just about what you post, but how others may use that content.

*Is the information I am sharing transparent?* Before sharing information to the public, does your post give out too much personal information?

Having a discussion with your teen about social networking sites can ease some anxiety about your child's safety. Social networking sites help us stay connected to family and friends. However, it's important to make sure your child knows how to be safe while online. Encourage them to enjoy the sites but to be safe at all times.





getting a cell phone for your child:

- Are your children independent?
- Do your children need to be in touch for safety reasons?
- Would having easy access to friends benefit them for social reasons?
- Do you think they'll use a cell phone responsibly – for example, not texting during class or disturbing others with their phone conversations?
- Can they adhere to limits you set for minutes talked and apps downloaded?
- Will they use the text, photo, and video functions responsibly and not to embarrass or harass others?

Approximately 95% of parents who buy their children a cell phone do so primarily for reasons of safety and to keep in touch with their children better and for safety. Our guess is that you probably fall into that same 95%.

Even though children are getting cell phones at younger and younger ages, parents generally don't do a good job of setting usage guidelines or discussing important topics like privacy, inappropriate texting and photo sharing, and safety basics. If you are getting your child a cell phone for communication and safety, then make sure that it is spelled out clearly and that you also understand the additional power you are putting into the hands of your child.

Don't be fooled: cell phones are not simply mobile telephones. Today, these devices are extremely powerful, mobile computers with access to the Internet and lots of con-



tent. So remember, anytime you give your child a mobile phone, you are giving them a mobile computer. We suggest you develop your parenting strategy with that in mind.

Because you're reading this guide we know that you want to act responsibly. We've assembled a parental checklist below to help you when buying a cell phone for your children.

### Parental Checklist for buying a cell phone

When you decide it is time to purchase a cell phone for your child, knowledge is power. Don't be afraid. Ask questions—lots of them. It's important for you to know exactly what you are buying so that you can make an informed decision. Only then will you know what to discuss with your child. Here is a suggested list of questions to ask at the store:

**What capabilities does the mobile phone have?** Find out if the device can access the Internet, send email, take pictures or videos, and download music, movies or apps.

**Can any of the mobile phone's capabilities be selectively disabled or turned off?** Can you disable the camera, Internet access, YouTube, or other features? Can you set ratings for music and movie access?

**What is included in the cell phone plan?** Find out if text messaging, email, Internet access, and app store access are included. Find out what additional features may be activated at a later time from the device without your explicit authorization. Likewise, find out what features have a limit. If you go over that limit, what will you end up paying?



**Are there parental controls and restrictions available for this device?** What does your cell phone provider offer for selectively restricting calling, texting, time of day usage, and other features for the device? How can you selectively turn on those restrictions? How can you view reports? If you enable any filters or controls, how can you prevent them from being circumvented? Will the store help you setup any parental controls and teach you how to keep them effective going forward?

**Does the phone have a GPS (also called location services)?** If so, are those location services enabled by default? Do they tag photos with the time and place where they were taken? Can you use the location services securely to find the location of the phone in an emergency? Making the decision to give your child a phone is not an easy one. However, when you do finally make that decision as a family, we urge you to have an open and honest dialogue that begins before you buy the cell phone and continues frequently after you've made the purchase.

## Family Discussion Starters

When you get a child a cell phone, you probably do so for increased safety and reliable communication. Your child likely sees their new cell phone as gateway to social communication with their friends or as an exciting new toy. They may not understand the implications of some of the new capabilities in their hands. It's important to set expectations and help your child understand that some of those "cool" features (like texting or song downloads) may end up costing you a lot of extra money on your monthly bill. Here are some questions to get the dialogue started.

**What is the reason for you getting a cell phone?**

**What are some of the things that excite you most about your new phone?** How do you plan to use it? What features do you love most? What are the right ways to behave with those features?

**What are appropriate times to use your cell phone?** What are some inappropriate times?

**What are your school's rules for appropriate and inappropriate cell phone usage?**

**Do you know that your cell phone costs money each month?** What are some of the features your phone has that you think cost extra money each month?

**Should you let your friends use your phone if they ask?**

# Tips for a Happy and Safe Halloween



Halloween is just around the corner! Below are links to important safety reminders.

**Safe Kids** <http://www.safekids.org/tip/halloween-safety-tips>

**American Academy of Pediatrics:** <http://bit.ly/2cUxXi1>

**Kids Health** <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/halloween.html>



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## Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:

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*Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.*

*To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:*

Deborah Housel  
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;  
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,  
ext. 1555  
or [dhousel@dor.org](mailto:dhousel@dor.org).

*All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.*

## ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

### CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

#### Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>

PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

#### NSTeens: <http://www.nsteens.org/>

A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

### FOR PARENTS:

#### Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>

A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

#### Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

#### iKeepSafe: <http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>

Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

#### Faith and Safety: <http://www.faithandsafety.org>

Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America

## LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

#### Bivona Child Advocacy Center

(Monroe, Wayne counties):

[BivonaCAC.org](http://BivonaCAC.org) / 585-935-7800

#### Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:

607-737-8479 / [chemungcounty.com](http://chemungcounty.com)

#### Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:

315-253-9795 / [cacofcayugacounty.org](http://cacofcayugacounty.org)

#### Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program

(Ontario County):

[cacfingerlakes.org](http://cacfingerlakes.org) / 315-548-3232

#### Darkness to Light organization: [d2l.org](http://d2l.org)

Steuben County:

#### Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:

[www.sthcs.org](http://www.sthcs.org) / 716-372-8532

#### NYS State Central Registry

(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):

1-800-342-3720

#### NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)

[nyscarcc.org](http://nyscarcc.org) / 866-313-3013

#### Tompkins County Advocacy Center:

[www.theadvocacycenter.org](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org)

607-277-3203

#### Wyoming County Sexual Abuse

Response Team: 585-786-8846

#### Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:

315-531-3417, Ext. 6