

Phone use guide to parents

Dangers of Smartphones

Smartphones are useful tools. They are useful to communicate, research, keep ourselves up to date and homework sometimes if needed.

But sometimes Smartphones pose several challenges and dangers for you and your child. These risks include cyberbullying, unprotected use of social networking, access to unsuitable content on the internet, eye strain, decreased attention span, and phone theft.

Cyberbullying

A growing issue, cyberbullying is the harassment of individuals through electronic channels such as mobiles, online forums, gaming chat rooms and social media.

Examples of cyberbullying could include hostile text messages, the spreading of rumours, or the sharing of embarrassing photos and videos.

As cyberbullying takes place online, it's a challenge for parents and or teachers to become aware of this issue unless a child speaks up about it.

In order to support your child please:

Work with the child to block the cyberbullies.

Tell children that you are pleased they have told you; reassure them that it is not their fault and that you are going to help. If the child knows the bullies from school or another organisation, contact the relevant staff member. If necessary, advise the child to change their contact details.

As a last resort, involve the Police. Cyberbullying can be considered a criminal offence under several different Acts. Parents should keep in mind that it is possible for their child to be the cause.

Unprotected use of social networking

Stranger danger isn't just an issue offline. Predators can easily hide their identities online while asking probing questions about a child's friends, family and interests.

Predators can also pretend to be the same age as your child, access their pictures and chat with them for a certain period of time.

Access to unsuitable content

The internet is home to many things, including inappropriate and adult content.

Studies have shown that 1 in 10 children between the age of 8 and 11 who go online have seen something nasty or worrying.

Even playing age-inappropriate games can expose children to swearing or images of violence.

Eye strain from mobile phones

Too much screen time can lead to burning, itchy or tired eyes in children. While children can better adapt to the high-energy, short-wavelength blue light that devices emit, too much exposure can lead to long term problems.

These long term side effects can include headaches, fatigue, blurred vision as well as head and neck ache.

Decreased attention span

Mobile phones, televisions and other devices are rewriting how our brains work – for adults and children alike.

It has been proven that children with prolonged access to screens can develop a decreased attention span.

This is unsurprising, given that modern technology means their brains are being trained to continually expect and receive new information.

Top 3 Tips for Child Safety on Mobile Phones

1. Set boundaries

It's important to set boundaries and limits with your kids. Talk to them about the boundaries themselves, and your reasons for setting them.

These boundaries could include screen time limits, restrictions on what apps they can use or where they can use their phone.

By setting these limits, you can encourage children to still enjoy activities that stimulate their minds in other ways, such as sports, board games or reading. It also allows you to reclaim family time and ensure your child isn't using age-inappropriate apps

2. Utilise parental controls & engage with your child's phone usage

Parental controls allow you to see exactly what sites and apps your child is accessing on their smartphone, tablet or computer. It also lets you see how long they are spending on these devices.

While there are many parental control apps to choose from, the standard choice is Google Family Link. Free to use, Google Family Link works with both Apple and Android devices.

While you still may want to use a parental control app to check what your child is doing online, it's always good to engage with them directly as well.

By encouraging them to share what they are doing on their phone, you may get a better insight into risks such as cyberbullying or their social network use.

3. Teach your children phone security

By teaching your child a few security measures now, you will help them keep their devices secure in the long run. Examples include:

- **Don't connect to public wi-fi** as that may give hackers access to your child's phone and information.
- **Don't share passwords** with friends or strangers.
- **Don't overshare online** – once a photo or video is out there, it can't be taken back.
- **Keep your phone close** in your bag or on-hand rather than leaving it in public places where it can be stolen.
- **Password protect the phone** so that if it is stolen, personal photos or messages can't be easily accessed.