



Cellphone Safety Tips from ConnectSafely.org

Cellphones are increasingly full-blown handheld computers, and everything that can be done on the Web via computer – photo-sharing, Web browsing, game playing, tune-swapping, real-time text chat, and (oh yeah) talking – can be done on a phone. Here are some basic ideas for keeping mobile phone use safe and constructive:

Smart socializing. Use the same good sense about what you post from your phone as from a computer. Once they're posted, text, photos, and video are tough to take back, can be copied and pasted elsewhere, and are up there pretty much forever. Think about the people in them (including you!). Reputations are at stake – even more so if racy photos are involved. Just best not to go there.

Phones are personal. Letting other people use your phone when you're not around is like letting them have the password to your social network profile. They can impersonate you. Which means they can play tricks on you that could really become a problem. It's a very good idea to lock your phone when you're not using it.

Bullying by phone. Because people socialize on cellphones as much as online, cyberbullying can be mobile too. Treat people on phones and the Web the way you would in person, and the risk of being bullied goes down. Be aware, too, of people randomly taking pictures at parties, in locker rooms, etc. – you may not want to be tagged in their social-network photo albums!

Sexting: The vast majority of kids – 99% – are smart and don't take, send, or post or even store nude photos of themselves or peers on their phones. People who do so can be charged with production, distribution, or possession of child pornography, a serious crime. They can also be subjected to jokes, bullying, blackmail, expulsion from school, loss of a job, etc. and the images can circulate forever. Just don't go there.

The value of "presence." If you do a lot of texting, consider the impact that being "elsewhere" might be having on the people around you. Your presence during meals, at parties, in the car, etc. is not only polite, it's a sign of respect and appreciated.

Down time is good. Constant texting and talking can affect sleep, concentration, school, and other things that deserve your thought and focus. You need your sleep and *real* friends understand there are times you just need to turn off the phone - harassment can happen between midnight and morning too.

Social mapping. Most cellphones now have GPS technology and there are a growing number of services that allow friends to pinpoint each other's physical location. If you use such a service, do so only with friends you know in person, and get to know the service's privacy features!

No texting while driving! Research shows that texting while driving can *significantly* increase the risk of a crash or near-crash situation. Silence your phone in the car, pull over if you need to use it, and of course follow your state's hands-free laws for mobile phones in cars.