



Cellphone Safety Tips from ConnectSafely.org

Cellphones are increasingly full-blown handheld computers, with 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 – possible 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 nudity or sex is involved.

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 good idea to lock your phone when you're not using it. It's not a good idea to let friends text for you while you're driving. Definitely don't text while driving – be safe and turn the phone off!

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 – you may not want to be tagged in their social-network photo albums.

Sexting: It's the same on phones as on the Web - do not take, send, post or even store on your phone nude photos of anyone under 18. You could be charged with production, distribution, or possession of child pornography, a serious crime. You could also be subjected to jokes, bullying, blackmail, expulsion from school, loss of a job, etc. and the images can circulate forever.

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!