

### **Cell Phones for Kids**

Is there a “right” age for a child’s first cell phone? No, only you know what’s best for your child. Most kids begin to show interest in cell phones prior to middle school. Many parents like being able to contact their kids by voice or text. Whenever it is that you allow your child to get dialed in, help him or her make smart choices.

### **A Cell phone Means New Responsibilities and Risks**

Having a cell phone requires increased responsibility on the part of a tween or teen. Kids and parents need to agree to rules for acceptable use, be it a “smart” phone with Internet connection or a “dumb” phone limited to voice, texts, and photos. Photos and text messages often go viral. What might initially seem to be an innocent text or photo could be extremely upsetting to peers, parents, and teachers and have long-term consequences for the subject of the text, the sender, and the recipient. Also, since smartphones connect to the Internet, anything illicit or forbidden there could cross paths with your child.

### **Encourage Safe and Responsible Phone Use**

Help your child become a responsible cell phone user. Here are a few ideas:

- Initially allow your child to have a “dumb” phone limited to voice and text. Don’t tempt your child with a smartphone until he or she proves responsible use.
- Regularly talk about smartphone safety: Guard against thieves and hackers. Don’t open attachments or links from unknown senders or give out your age, address, school, or location. Insist your child check with you before downloading anything free. Don’t share passwords with others.
- Make certain that your child understands that cell phone use is a privilege and not an entitlement. Reserve the right to check sent and received messages. Discuss that being responsible enough to have a cell phone means not only taking care of the phone itself but also using it appropriately. Explain YOUR definition of appropriate use. Talk about unacceptable use such as texts that make fun of or belittle others. Also discuss how a photo or video taken with the phone could be posted on the Internet and impossible to retract.
- Limit your child’s cell phone use, and establish “phone-free” areas and times, such as at the dinner table. Remember that you are the most important role model for your child and teach appropriate phone use by your own actions.