

Cell Phones

This discussion guide will help you facilitate a conversation with parents about cell phones. Use the following questions and stories to get parents thinking and talking about this issue. You may also want to show the Cell Phones parent tip video and hand out the parent tip sheets on cell phones, texting, and sexting to help spark the discussion.

What's going on with your kids?

Questions to encourage parents to share experiences, concerns, and solutions

1. What is the right age for a child to have his or her own cell phone? What factors should parents consider?
2. How do kids use cell phones differently than adults?
3. Which features (cameras, texting, ring tones, Internet access) pose the biggest problems for kids, families, and schools? Which features are appropriate for kids and at what age?
4. What challenges or concerns have you faced with your own children and cell phones? How have you handled the situations? What has worked? What hasn't?

What would you do?

Stories to discuss, role play, and deepen conversation

Elementary school child

Nine-year-old Zach has been begging his parents for a cell phone. They recently moved to a new area, and most of Zach's new friends at school have cell phones. His parents are considering getting a phone for him; after all, it would be a good safety check in case he misses the bus or has an emergency.

- » Should Zach's parents get him a cell phone? Why or why not?
- » If they get him a phone, what kinds of features should they choose — camera, text messaging, etc? How can they limit and monitor his usage?
- » What can they do to encourage responsible cell phone use early on?
- » Do cell phones help parents become more connected to their kids (knowing where they are and what's going on) or do they provide kids with more freedom to get in trouble? Or both?

Middle school preteen or teen

Looking over the latest cell phone bill for her family, Yana was shocked to see it was \$200, when it's usually \$125! She found that the extra charges were from the texting and downloading ring tones that her eighth-grade twins must have been doing.

- » Her kids may not know that texting and downloading cost so much. How can Yana talk to them and make this a productive lesson about money?
- » How are ring tones and other features a way for kids to express identity?

High school teen

Seventeen-year-old Jason's cell phone use is getting to be too much. When the family sits down to dinner, goes to a movie, or even visits with Grandma, he is always answering his calls from friends or texting them. It's becoming too intrusive. His parents ask him to turn the phone off during the few times the family gets to eat dinner or be together, but they sometimes find him sneaking calls or texts. Jason gets angry when they ask him to limit use because he pays his own cell phone bill with money from his after-school job.

- » What can be done to draw boundaries for Jason — even if he is almost an adult?
- » What can Jason's parents do to help disconnect him from his phone — and connect him more to time with family?