

Cell Phone Safety

Top Ten Tips for Teens



Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.
Cyberbullying Research Center

1. Only give out your cell phone number to people you know for sure you can trust.

2. Do not take any cell phone pictures or video that are sexual in nature. First off, if they involve nudity or partial nudity, they are illegal and classified as child pornography - a felony offense in most states. The intent of the parties does not matter, nor does whether permission was granted. Secondly, they have the tendency to get into the hands of the wrong people. Think about your reputation.

3. Do not send texts or capture pictures or video on your cell phone that you wouldn't feel comfortable sharing with your parents.

4. Ask yourself how you'd feel if the text you sent or the picture or video you captured were broadcast all across the school, and all across the Internet. Even if you personally don't send it around, others can and often do.

5. Remember that all of the text, photos, and videos you create with your phone are saved and available as digital evidence. They are either stored on the servers of your cell phone provider, or on your cell phone provider's web site in your individual web-accessible account, or on the flash memory or SIM card of your phone and on other phones - even if you have deleted them.

6. Schools can take your cell phone when they have reasonable suspicion that it has been involved in some violation of school policy or the law.

7. Never text and drive. No text is worth losing your life over, or taking someone else's. If something is urgent, pull the vehicle over to a safe place before dealing with it.

8. Remember that having a cell phone is a privilege and not a right. Treat it as such. Appreciate that your parents have allowed you to have one (and often purchased it for you), and you'll earn more of their respect. Many youth have sabotaged their future (e.g., admission into college, scholarships, job opportunities, legal problems and costs, criminal prosecution, being placed on sex offender registries) because they have misused computers or cell phones. It is NOT worth it.

13 year-old Female from Florida

Some random guy was texting me and was asking me weird questions. I was scared. I told my mom and we called the cops.

9. Don't respond to text messages from numbers and people you don't know. Learn how you can block certain individuals (via their cell phone numbers) from contacting you. Don't subject yourself unnecessarily to people who are mean to you when you can keep them from sending you any messages.

10. Keep your cell phone keypad locked (and the PIN or password safe and private), so that others can't grab it, unlock it, and use it to get you into trouble when you're not looking.

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at Florida Atlantic University and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Together, they lecture across the United States on the causes and consequences of cyberbullying and offer comprehensive workshops for parents, teachers, counselors, mental health professionals, law enforcement, youth and others concerned with addressing and preventing online aggression.

The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents. For more information, visit <http://www.cyberbullying.us>. © 2009 Cyberbullying Research Center - Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin