

TEEN TOPICS

What Parents Need To Know About Cell Phones

(NAPSA)—Next time your teen complains that not having a cell phone is hurting his or her social life, there may be a ring of truth to it.

A recent study by the marketing research firm Context found that the cell phone has become the number-one way for teens to communicate—and that they will often avoid contact with peers that don't have them.

More than half of all American teens between the ages of 11 and 17 own a cell phone—and are more inclined to use it to text message rather than on long, drawn-out conversations. According to a recent Pew Internet & American Life Project report on teens and technology, nearly two-thirds of teen cell phone users text message several times a day.

Consider the following tips to help you decide if your teen is ready for a cell phone:

- Check, and double-check, your plan. Some mobile providers offer free unlimited incoming messages or unlimited text messages. Your teen may not need as many voice minutes as you do, so choose a plan with a minimal amount of minutes for emergencies and checking in with you.

- Don't spend for a special handset. Most mobile phones are equipped to send text messages. Users can send text to most cell phones regardless of the recipient's carrier and also to many computer-based e-mail accounts.

- Institute rules at the outset. Be clear about appropriate times to use the phone for both calls and texting. Be sure your teen understands basic cell phone etiquette and restrictions while at school or while driving.



Teens today are more inclined to use their cell phones to text message rather than using them to make calls.

- Monitor handset usage. Recent studies linked the amount of time teens use their cell phones with a level of unhappiness or emptiness in their lives, so be aware of this situation.

- To reduce costs, consider a shared plan or a prepaid phone plan that can be loaded with minutes. Also, look into rate plans that offer perks such as unlimited use of push-to-talk. Some carriers, such as SouthernLINC Wireless, offer plans with unlimited push-to-talk use, which do not count against the minutes available.

- Learn how to text message. When disasters strike and the communications networks are jammed, text messages are often the only way to communicate with the outside world. If nothing else, learning to text message will allow your kids to communicate with you in a different way.

Providing teens with affordable, reliable communications options can ultimately save parents a lot of headaches.