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RACING TO KEEP UP: Strategies for parents to talk with their kids about technology use and ways to keep the home computer safe.

"Racing to keep up" helps parents better understand and guide their children's use of technology. With strategies, and information written within a framework of child development, this unique and informative book offers real life solutions to the challenges of talking to children about technology, setting up rules for technology use and protecting the home computer. The book is divided into two parts. The book is available through our web site, ChildrenOnline.org or directly through www.lulu.com/content/3940085

- Part One: Talking to kids about technology
- 1) "You won a free iPod" - Information and strategies for children under the age of ten.
 - 2) "Who's on your buddy list" - Information and strategies for the middle school years.
 - 3) "None of your business" - Information and strategies for guiding teens online.
 - 4) Wanna chat? - Information and strategies for chat, instant messaging and online communication
 - 5) A World of opposites - Information and strategies for social networking sites where friends are strangers and privacy is public.

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16th Edition of the Children Online Newsletter.

This marks our 12th year of consulting to schools, parents and organizations. We are thrilled to be continuing important conversations on children/teens and technology. We look forward to updating our research in this area, while meeting new parents and young people to help us be better educated on this timely topic.



As we like to say "change is the only constant" with regard to communications technology and children. It is no different this year. Our attention increasingly turns to the use of cell phones as we hear about, and observe, more issues concerning the use of cell phones. Cell phones are the main topic of this month's newsletter.

We are also thrilled to announce the publication of our new book "Racing to Keep Up" (see the side bar for details). This book, intended for busy parents, is an easy read. It is designed so that parents can open to any chapter of interest to find strategies and tips to help them better protect their children as well as their family's privacy and computer online.

As always, we welcome your comments. We have a new telephone number for Children Online. 413-214-1225.

Best wishes,
 Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman

Please contact Marje or Doug at marjem@childrenonline.org or dougf@childrenonline.org for further information on our consulting services.

WIRED 24 / 7

Whenever you see a group of teenagers, you are likely to see a lot of cell phones. Teens are never far from their phones whether in class, at the dinner table, hanging out with friends or watching a movie. Many teens seem to have an intense need to be connected to the phone. Ask a teen to turn off the phone and you might get a vacant stare, a plea to keep it on, or eyes rolled upward. Sometimes all three.

Teens today accessorize their phones with beads, stickers or jewelry. Their phones become a symbol of identification,

- 6) The World of gaming - Information and strategies for game playing online.
- 7) "You texted her how many times"?
Information and strategies for cell phones and texting.
- 8) "Don't worry Mom, I'm careful" - Information and strategies for negotiating privacy online.
- 9) Glossary of Terms

Part Two: Protecting the home computer

- 10) How to create secure passwords
- 11) How to recognize and avoid scams and threats to your computer
- 12) How to better protect your family's privacy online
- 13) Taking control of your child's Internet experience

About Children Online

Children Online offers innovative and comprehensive workshops on Internet safety and online education to students, parents, faculty and administrators. Our approach, unique in the field of Internet safety, combines a thorough understanding of Internet technologies, child development and counseling, to focus on the impact of the internet on the social, emotional and language development of young people.

Doug Fodeman and Marje Monroe, experts in technology, counseling and education, work together to provide invaluable research and tools for parents and schools with practical real-life solutions to the issues faced by young people online. Since 1997, Marje and Doug have spoken to thousands of students, teachers and parents. They have several publications in the area of Internet safety and offer a free online newsletter. More detailed information can be found at ChildrenOnline.org.

another way to express their personality. Like the latest sneakers, jeans or backpacks, teens see their phones as important social currency and a ticket into being accepted. The immediacy of cell phones and the Internet has created a sense of urgency among teens. Teens often feel compelled to read a text and reply right away. Waiting minutes can feel like hours to a fifteen-year-old boy trying to impress his friends. While working in a boarding school, I was faced with the importance of cell phones everyday. Asking a fourteen-year-old girl to give up her phone at "lights out" often brought real fear and anxiety. For that girl far from home, her phone was not simply a communication device; it was her alarm clock, personal assistant, social manager and, all too often, her security blanket.

Parents and teachers need to acknowledge that for teens, the cell phone has become an important part their lives, a way to express themselves and be part of a community. However, constant reliance and accessibility to a phone can be unhealthy for kids. A small, thin phone can create a void between the teens and the places they explore or the "friends" they communicate with through texting. The phone acts as a buffer to social consequences and face-to-face realities. Teens, who would not consider using sexually provocative language in person, do it easily and often online or on the cell phone. Teens who might be timid or awkward in social settings, find themselves feeling confident and comfortable texting. Teens who are responsible, careful, and thoughtful to others in school or at home can be mean, reckless and rude while texting. Many teens tell us they would rather break up through texting than have a voice or face-to-face conversation. Teens engage in these behaviors because they can. They do this because the immediacy and ease of texting takes away the need for the often hard but necessary face to face conversations.

It can be a tall order to ask teens to give up acceptance and happiness that they equate with their phones. However, it is important that we begin to set healthy limits on cell phone use and helping teens find quiet time in an otherwise busy and plugged-in life.

Strategies for cell phones:

- Consider buying a phone without Internet or texting capabilities for children or younger teens.

For the most part, parents give their children cell phones for safety reasons. Children, however, want the phones for fun and connection to friends. With computers at home and in schools, children and younger teens do not need Internet and texting access on their mobile phones.

Note: It is difficult to take off extra phone services once purchased. If possible, do research before buying a cell phone package. Have conversations with different cell phone companies to help you.

- Set limits for your child/teen and follow up.

Allow a limited amount of texting and follow up with the phone bill. For example, you can purchase a package that allows 100 text messages a month for a fee. While your child can go over that number, the phone bill will show that and charge more money.

- Have clear consequences for teens who push boundaries

Take away access to the phone for example if they abuse their texting privileges. Follow through every time and create meaningful consequences.

- Encourage responsible and thoughtful communication through text messaging

As with Instant messaging and networking sites, it is easy to send mean or provocative messages. Educate your children and teens about the importance of being responsible and respectful while texting.

- Do not allow text messaging until the age of 14

Young children are not developmentally ready for the instant decisions they make while texting. They are easily manipulated and can become targets for bullies or marketing scams. Children are vulnerable and easily hurt by mean comments through text. Texting has quickly become a vehicle for bullying or teasing.

- Do not allow your children to drive and use their cell phone.

Teen drivers are most at risk for accidents. Add use of cell phones or texting and driving can be a very deadly combination.

- Avoid all or nothing responses. Teens are very fearful of losing phone privileges. Consider negotiating rules and limits that both of you can live with.

CELL PHONE RESOURCES

Below are links to cell phone resources that address some of the issues discussed above.

1. Herb Weisbaum's review of cell phones for kids at MSNBC.com. [Stay connected: Best cell phones for children](#)
2. The cell phone [Firefly Mobile](#) is designed so that parents have complete control over who their child can call and who can call their child. This is ideal for the parent who wishes their younger child to have a phone but wants to avoid all the features such as texting, ads and contact from others.
3. [Kajeet.com](#) is a cell phone service for kids and includes parental controls.

4. ["Straight Talk on Cell Phones for Children"](#) from the good folks at ConsumerReports.org.

5. Seattle Times Article (3/2007) which focuses on problems faced by teens using cell phone texting. [R U still up? Teens are text-messaging friends into the wee hours](#) By Stephanie Dunnewind

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