

## ***Counselor's Corner***

Many middle school students, especially 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, at CCS already have cell phones, and with Christmas around the corner, Santa may be delivering a brand new cell phone to your child. With that in mind, I thought now would be a great time to dispense some tips about cell phone safety to our middle school parents. While cell phones are fantastic devices, in the hands of middle school students, they can quickly turn into “not so nice” devices. Listed below you will find some general tips about cell phone usage.

I have also included a list of things to discuss with your child that directly relate to text messaging. When older students come to my office to discuss a personal problem, I can just about guarantee that the words “text message” will be mentioned. Texting is a **HUGE** part of their lives.

Personally, my #1 tip is to make a contract. That is right- a contract! Decide what your expectations and limitations are and type up a document stating them. You and your child should both sign the contract. With this method, there will be no confusion and no whining. I have included two sample contracts. One is simple, and one is more detailed. As a parent, you can decide which works best.

Finally, when it comes to technology of any kind, I recommend you talk to your child about the responsibility attached to it. You can say something like **THIS**:

- Technology is a privilege, not a right. I expect you to use it responsibly. You should never use it to humiliate, embarrass, or send personal information; misrepresent yourself or someone else; put someone down; or share embarrassing pictures or information about yourself or others. Remember that it is easy for things to get out of control. You know it. I know it. I reserve the right to check the computer and your cell phone. If I see that you are violating your privilege of access to technology, I will take it away from you until you can earn my trust back. This is my unbreakable, unshakable law.

### **\* Top Cell Phone Safety Tips for Parents**

1. **DO** speak with your child about his/her cell phone habits and your safety concerns.
2. **DO** set limits on what your child can do on his/her cell phone (i.e. who they can talk to, when they can be on their phones, and the number of text messages they can send).
3. **DO** access your cell phone carrier's parental control settings and decide the settings that will work best for you.
4. **DO** talk with your kids about the consequences for cyberbullying.

5. **DO** know what your child can do with his/her cell phone.
6. **DO NOT** hesitate to get help from school and law enforcement authorities if you think a bully or predator may be targeting your child. Save copies of all messages and report the misuse to your service provider.
7. **DO** let your child know that you will regularly review the pictures, texts, and call list on his/her cell phone.

(\* Tips were modified from a list provided by WebWiseKids: [www.webwisekids.org](http://www.webwisekids.org))

### **Text Messaging: What to Tell Your Child BEFORE He/She Texts**

- **NEVER** respond to text messages from an unknown number.
- Use text messaging appropriately. Text messaging is useful for making plans or just saying hello. Text messaging should never be used to discuss highly emotional topics. Fighting with friends or breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend through text messaging is **NOT** appropriate.
- Think before you text. If you wouldn't say it to the person's face, you **SHOULD NOT** text it. Texting should never be used to harass, embarrass, humiliate, or threaten others. That is **CYBERBULLYING**, and it is punishable by law.
- If you receive text messages that make you uncomfortable, you need to tell me about it so I can help you and report it, if necessary

### **SAMPLE CELL PHONE CONTRACT #1**

- **Cost of the cell phone:** \$95 (Max's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday gift)
- **Monthly cost:** \$65, including insurance
- **Phone payments:** Parents agree to pay \$55 per month for Max's cell phone. Max agrees to pay \$10 of his \$25-a-month allowance toward the cost of the phone.
- **School/schoolwork:** Max agrees to keep his cell phone home during school hours, off during homework time after school, and to show it to his parents each evening.
- **Phone usage:** Max has 500 minutes per/month and will monitor the minutes. Max has unlimited text messaging but agrees to text only family and close friends and not use his phone while doing homework or after

10:00 p.m. Max agrees to answer his parents' calls immediately. Friends can use the phone only in emergencies. If his parents feel he is overusing his cell phone, his parents will ask him to turn it off.

- **Consequences:** If Max does not follow the contract, the phone will be taken away for one week or longer, depending on the violation

### **SAMPLE CONTRACT #2:**

Vanessa will be given a cell phone for Christmas and will follow these rules:

1. All contacts in the phone book must be approved by Mom or Dad
2. No phone calls after 9:00 p.m. weekdays or 10:00 p.m. weekends unless they are to mom and dad, or pre-approved by us.
3. Your plan allows for a maximum of 150 text messages a month.
4. Internet access has been disabled.
5. No cell phone at any meal or during family time (may ask permission if school related).
6. If asked to turn off/stop playing/get off cell phone, must do so immediately. When at home, will only use the regular phone instead of cell phone to make calls.
7. When out with friends, you will always have cell phone with you and 'on' so mom and dad can reach you if needed.
8. Will not answer calls or respond to text messages from unknown numbers.

- **If the following rules have not been met, we will have to implement the following discussed consequences:**

- a) If you go over in texts, you must pay the difference (the phone company charges 10 cents per text)
- b) If you go over in minutes, you must pay the difference for that month. If it happens again, then hour usage will decrease (8:00 p.m. weekdays, no cell phone on Sundays).
- c) If asked more than twice to turn off/put down cell phone, or the phone is used during meal or family time, personal phone privileges will be removed for a day (may only be used to call mom and dad).
- d) This is a one-month trial period, if all rules are followed for thirty days, mom and dad will increase hours on weekends.
- e) This contract will be reevaluated every six months as Vanessa gets older to possibly receive more texts, internet, or extra money for ring tones, etc.

