



# Mobile phones – child safety checklist

You can now access the internet on most mobile phones. This access brings a world of incredible opportunities in terms of communication, interaction and entertainment, there are certain potential risks to children posed via the internet. These risks include accessing adult content, such as pornography and “stranger danger” contact in chat services.

Mobile providers in Australia (Telstra, Optus, Vodafone, Hutchison and Virgin and other third party resellers including fone zone, Crazy Johns and Telechoice) have recognised these risks and have taken steps to help you protect your child from potentially harmful content accessible via their mobile phone. There are also things you can do to reduce the potential for your child receiving an unexpectedly high bill in association with their mobile phone service such as blocking international calls and premium rate services.

This guide, written by Australian Communications and Media Authority in collaboration with the children's internet charity, Childnet International, gives you a checklist of important questions to ask your Mobile Provider when purchasing a mobile phone so that you can ensure you have the tools and support to help protect children and make sure they get the most out of using their mobile phone safely.

## 1. SAFETY ADVICE

### Questions to ask

Ask for information and advice about the phone and the services that are available on it, so that you can ensure your children know how to use it safely.

### Background

Your mobile provider is committed to providing you with information and advice on the safe use of their service. Be sure to check that they are keeping you informed by asking them for safety information and by looking for information in retail outlets and on their website.

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association also has useful general tips on mobile phones on its web site at:  
<http://www.amta.org.au/default.asp?id=367>

## 2. COSTS & CHARGES

### Questions to ask

Do you offer both pre-paid and post-paid plans? How do they compare?

### Background

Prepaid mobile services are great for keeping track of your spending by limiting the amount of available credit. Note that emergency calls to 000 can be made even if there is no credit on the phone.

What services do you offer to help manage spending on the phone?



If I choose a fixed term contract, what is the total cost of the plan over the contract period?

Fixed term contracts may include a payment for the mobile handset as well as the cost of calls. This may have implications if you choose to cancel your contract.

### **3. INTERNATIONAL AND PREMIUM RATE SERVICES**

#### **Questions to ask**

Can you bar the phone from making calls to international and to premium rate (190) numbers and from sending text messages to premium rate (19) numbers?

What can be done to stop a premium rate subscription service?

What safeguards do you have in place to limit the possibility of inadvertently signing up to a reverse-billed service?

#### **Background**

Many mobile services provide access to high cost international calls and premium rate services. Children may not realise the cost of using these services, or may access them without your knowledge or permission.

Higher cost premium rate services also include text messages or calls to 19 and 190 numbers to purchase ringtones, wallpapers, enter competitions, vote in contests and receive horoscopes.

Some companies supply premium rate services on an ongoing or subscription basis where you may be charged at a flat rate, a weekly rate, or for each message you receive. Ringtones and jokes may be supplied in this way. This may make it harder to manage spending.

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association's web site has other helpful tip for managing your spending at: <http://www.amta.org.au/AMTA/default.asp?ID=570>

### **4. QUESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS**

#### **Questions to ask**

What should I do if I have a question or a complaint about my child's mobile phone?

#### **Background**

If you have a question or complaint about any mobile phone service, contact your mobile operator in the first instance.

If you cannot resolve the issue with your mobile operator then contact the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman on 1800 062 058 for assistance.

### **5. INTERNET ACCESS**

#### **Questions to ask**

Does the phone have access to the internet?

If so, is it possible to disable internet access?

#### **Background**

The internet can provide a wealth of information, but it can also expose your child to inappropriate content (for example adults only sites).

Unlike the internet in your home, filters to help block inappropriate content are not readily available for mobile handsets.



## **6. CHAT SERVICES**

### **Questions to ask**

Can this phone access services where users can anonymously chat to each other?

What safety measures do you have in place for users of mobile chat services?

### **Background**

Chat services can be accessed on mobile phones using SMS and WAP (an Internet-like service that is customized for mobile phones) enabling users to chat anonymously with other users. Types of services include general chat, games (which allow you to chat to other gamers) and dating.

Providers of mobile chat services must implement safety measures that minimise the risk of the service being used to facilitate illegal contact between adults and children. Measures that may enhance the safety of users include monitoring the chat, filtering content to remove possible contact information and placing services behind access controls to restrict access to people who are not at least 18 years of age.

## **7. ACCESS TO CONTENT NOT SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN**

### **Questions to ask**

Does the phone allow access to content that is not suitable for children?

Is this content automatically blocked on this phone?

### **Background**

Some mobile phone providers provide access to content that is not suitable for children, i.e. content rated MA15+ or R18+. Before this content can be provided, customers must request access and provide their provider with proof that they are 18 years or older.

Proving your age is a one-off action, so if a child inherits a phone, you should confirm with your provider that access to content that is not suitable for children has not been enabled.

## **8. DEALING WITH CONTENT NOT SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN**

### **Questions to ask**

How do I report receipt of content that is unsuitable for children? (For example, content unsuitable for children is received on the phone even though access to this type of content has not been enabled by the mobile provider.)

### **Background**

It is important to let your mobile provider know if content that is not suitable for children is received, both to protect yourself and other users. If you are not satisfied that your mobile provider has addressed your concerns about the provision of content that is not suitable for children adequately, you may escalate your complaint to the communications regulator, ACMA, by sending an email to: [mobilecontent@acma.gov.au](mailto:mobilecontent@acma.gov.au).

## **9. NUISANCE/MALICIOUS CALLS**

### **Questions to ask**

What can I do if I receiving abusive calls

### **Background**

Children may send or receive nuisance or threatening calls or text messages from other children. This behaviour can be part of bullying or intimidation – while bullying is not in itself new, the



or messages?  
Can I block calls from a particular person?

use of mobile phones may make it harder to deal with. Your mobile phone provider should have procedures and tips to help deal with nuisance and malicious calls.

Further information on bullying and mobile phones is also available from the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association at:

<http://www.amta.org.au/default.asp?id=367>

## **10. PROTECTING YOUR MOBILE PHONE FROM LOSS**

### **Questions to ask**

What precautions can I take to minimise the risk if my phone is lost or stolen?

### **Background**

Your phone company may offer insurance to help protect you if your phone is lost or stolen.

Services are available for reporting a missing phone, and the phone can be programmed to minimise the risk of misuse. Make a note of your phone's IMEI number (which can be found by dialling \*#06#) which will help if you need to report your phone stolen.

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association has information on what to do if your phone is lost or stolen available at: <http://www.amta.org.au/?Page=650>

## **11. UNSOLICITED EMAILS/TEXT MESSAGES**

### **Questions to ask**

Do you have a number to call to report spam or filters to help block it?

### **Background**

Unsolicited emails/text messages (commonly known as spam) are not as prevalent on mobile phones as it is on computers with access to the internet. It does exist, however, and can be intrusive and deceptive.

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association has detailed information on mobile spam available at:

[http://www.amta.org.au/amta/site/amta/downloads/pdfs\\_2006/Spam%20and%20Scam.pdf](http://www.amta.org.au/amta/site/amta/downloads/pdfs_2006/Spam%20and%20Scam.pdf)

## **12. BLUETOOTH ENABLED PHONES**

### **Questions to ask**

Does the phone have Bluetooth facilities?

### **Background**

Bluetooth technology is used for short range communication between your mobile phone and to other Bluetooth-enabled devices (such as a wireless headset) or mobile phone.

Can I disable Bluetooth or hide the phone from

This allows communication between your child's mobile phone and other Bluetooth-enabled phones in the near vicinity. If



other users?

enabled, your child may receive unexpected and unwanted messages from other Bluetooth phone users nearby, who may be able to access to information stored on your child's phone. For example, his or her contact list could be vulnerable. You may want to switch off bluetooth so the phone is invisible to other users.

ACMA contact details:

CANBERRA CENTRAL  
Purple Building Benjamin Offices  
Chan Street  
Belconnen ACT 2617  
PO Box 78  
Belconnen ACT 2616  
T: 02 6219 5555  
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Level 44, Melbourne Central Tower  
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