

Mobile Phone Use Teenagers UK

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www.maximumpda.com

5 Million UK School Children Own A Mobile Phone

New data from research consultancy "mobileYouth", whose clients include Vodafone, Nokia, Orange and Disney, cites the number of under 16s in the UK owning a mobile phone will grow to 5.5 million (an increase of nearly half a million from the previous year)

Whilst the growth in the numbers of youngsters owning mobile phones slowed down in 2004 as the market reached maturity, growth in 2004 was driven by primary school (5-10yr old) children getting their first phone.

Amid the current controversy surrounding mobile ownership by the very young, mobileYouth data shows that the driving force behind young children owning mobile phones is not the mobile industry, but the parents. Most have cited security concerns as one of the main reasons why their children should own a mobile phone.

The mobile industry still has a long way to go to satisfy the growing need for "mobile parenting". One of the key growth application areas focused on the very young in 2005 will be the emergent mobile tracking sector that allows parents to track the whereabouts of their children at any given time.

Mobile Youth

mobileYouth recommends that the mobile industry take measures to demonstrate they are catering for the needs of the parents rather than the pester power of children during 2005 by educating guardians as to the potential advantages and disadvantages of these technologies.

Manchester Evening News

Around a sixth of the UK's 35 million subscribers are on the wrong tariffs because of ignorance about alternatives, according to Virgin Mobile. A study by the MVNO of 1,455 mobile subscribers has reported that almost half of UK subscribers have never changed their mobile package. This is despite 17% of subscribers admitting to feeling that th...

Mobile calls could cost you £1,200 too much
Peter Sharples

MOBIL Research for mobile phone retailer The Link suggests that 80 per cent of users are paying out between £10 and £110 a month too much.

The study has revealed an average spend of £586 per year on talk time, texting and picture messaging and found that a large proportion of users are losing £180 on average a year because they are on the wrong tariff. E phone users could be adding over £1,200 a year to their bills by overspending on the wrong tariffs.

One-third (34 per cent) are spending up to £25 extra on their bill every month, while two-thirds (66 per cent) are missing out on savings of between £25 and £110 per month.

Ricky Gallagher of The Link's store in Market Street, Manchester, said: "We've found that a surprising amount of people are unaware of the extra costs incurred by not reviewing their mobile bills regularly."

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To put phone users on the right track, The Link is offering them a "mobile healthcheck" every Tuesday for the next three months at the Manchester store.

Experts will analyse users' mobile bills, advise on how to make savings, recommend suitable tariffs and highlight problem areas like text messaging and talk time.

They will also help to demystify mobile jargon - including aspects of bills that people may not understand like message bundle texts and "bolt-ons".

Mobile Youth

The number of seven to 10-year-olds owning a mobile phone has almost doubled over the past three years, according to a survey published today. The new figures follow on from mobileYouth's own research last year which showed that there are some 400,000 children under the age of 10 in the UK with a mobile phone/ In 2001, 13% of primary school ...

e-Telegraph- **Average age for child to have first mobile is now 8**

By David Derbyshire, Consumer Affairs Editor

(Filed: 20/04/2005)

The average age for children to be given their first mobile phone has fallen to **eight**, a new report shows.

A million youngsters between the ages of five and nine now own a phone - double the number two years ago. Another half a million are expected to have a mobile by the end of the year.

The findings show that parents are ignoring official health warnings about the hypothetical risks of mobile phone radiation on developing brains. Psychologists are also concerned that overprotective parents are "mollycoddling" young children and denying them the freedom needed to develop into mature teenagers.

The Mobile Youth report looked at the behaviour of 1,000 children around the world, including 345 in Britain. It estimated that a quarter of five- to nine-year-olds have phones.

The average age at which a child gets their first phone is eight - compared with 12 in the United States. It predicts that the number of under-16s owning a mobile phone will grow to 5.5 million this year - a rise of around 500,000 on 2004.

Most children under the age of 10 use their phones to stay in touch with their parents, said Graham Brown, the chief executive officer of Wireless World Forum, the research company behind the study. "They are using mobile phones to speak directly to mum or dad - or as a one way communication from a parent, usually after school or when parents are out at work," he said.

"As a child grows up in the early teens they start to develop a sense of independence and become more mobile socially and their parents lose a bit of control over them," he said.

"Parents in some instances use a mobile phone as a bargaining tool - it's one way they can exert some control over their kids. Children have to conform to what their parents want in return for getting their mobile phone bills paid."

Some psychologists have argued that children thrive under conditions of "benign neglect", and that constant parental supervision or contact deprives them of the independence they need to develop into mature adults.

Even on a "character building" gap year abroad, teenagers are rarely more than a mobile phone or e-mail away from their friends and family at home.

Dr Nick Barlow, a child psychologist at Leicester Royal Infirmary, said mobile phones could give parents a false sense of confidence.

"Parents are buying them to give a sense of security," he said. "However, all these things possibly lead to less independence than a child would have had five or 10 years ago."

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Michael Clarke, radiation expert at the Health Protection Agency, said there was a contradiction in parents calling for mobile phone masts to be erected away from schools and then allowing their youngsters access to handsets which expose them to far higher levels of radiation.

Childalert.co.uk

Children and the mobile phone! - an addiction, a necessity or just fun?

There is no doubting the benefits of the mobile phone. Ease of communication, the anywhere, anytime contact - with friends, relations, colleagues and in theory at least the efficiency brought to busy lives. The benefits have been sold to us worldwide by the mobile phone industry, and in the main we have made the judgment that, yes, the mobile phone is an exceptionally useful tool that advances personal communication beyond all our expectations of only a few years ago. And the future developments around the corner will equally amaze.

But every technological advance that provides such dramatic benefits has consequential costs and it is this area of mobile phone usage that we believe warrants more attention, especially their use by young people.

9 out of 10 children in the UK own a mobile phone. We believe as responsible parents that the benefits of immediate communication is a necessity - what happens if your child can't get a lift home; it helps to manage the family's busy schedule on the move; we feel safer knowing that our son can contact us if he's in trouble; it's cheaper giving him the responsibility of the cost of phone calls - he gets an allowance and it is up to him to manage his activities - our phone bill at home has been reduced significantly! All in all the mobile phone is hugely convenient.

These are some parent's points of view, others are less positive:

A father of one 16 year told us 'We give Emma, our daughter, £20 pocket money with extra for her school dinners. We learnt recently that all this money is being spent on text messaging her friends. She hasn't had a meal in school for the past 3 months and worst of all considers no other activity or hobby worthy of her pocket money.'

When the mobile phone becomes not just an essential item for communication but instead something that takes control of a child's life, parents have a right to be worried.

We have had parents ask for help - telling us that their teenager can do nothing else but sit by their mobile phone waiting for calls or text messages. They say 'my child will no longer communicate with the family, her phone has to be beside her day and night, we often hear her texting or talking in the early hours of the morning, her homework is suffering, her hobbies no longer take priorityshe is not the daughter we once had'

Childalert approached various experts who deal with addiction in children. They say addictive behaviour is too strong a word for mobile phone usage by children, but they recognise the worrying signs of dependency. The mobile phone is considered an accessory by many but could be more appropriately described as a 'comfort blanket'. Getting a phone call or a text message implies an importance, 'somebody wants me'. It boosts the receivers self esteem and self worth.

This is particularly true for teenagers who are struggling with their identity and social status. Phone usage does not only increase the opportunity to bond with friends and to organise a social life on the move and privately, it also provides a symbol for acceptance. This is important to a teenager's individuality and confidence.

The youth of today are the first new generation to have an 'anytime, anyplace, anywhere mobile communications culture' and excessive and more proficient use of it can be viewed as part of defining generational differences - a form of rebellion.

This culture, however, is no comfort to parents who cannot understand the obsession. Only a few years ago we all managed to organise ourselves and keep in touch with each other perfectly well without the mobile. Now some children are so obsessed that they are unable to communicate uninterrupted, are constantly checking for messages and become irritable if they have to be away from their phone for any period of time. The family as a whole is finding the 'mobile culture' stressful causing rifts between members

In some families the situation has become far worse; text messaging has become an obsession that needs to be fed by constant communication and that means constant funding.

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'I discovered our daughter had been using my credit card without my permission to buy more mobile airtime for her phone.' Others perhaps, steal cash to feed the habit.

These are worrying developments - so to help parents who may feel they have a difficult situation on their hands regarding their child's mobile phone usage, Childalert advise the following. It is important that parents understand the concerns and what effects these can have for children and for the family.

Concerns

1. The mobile phone industry and their marketing techniques

Mobile phones have become popular and convenient making their demand high. Access is universal and affordable, and there is little regulation in terms of purchase or usage. In order to capture the youth market the pay as you go strategy is in place allowing anyone of any age to obtain a mobile phone (often free) and to link to a pay as you go airtime package. The attraction is a socially iconic 'toy' with virtually unlimited access.

2. Personal development during the teenage years

The mobile phone f worth ensuring popularity with friends with whom communications can be continuous. The phone also feeds the desire for attention, acceptability and satisfies a teenager's emotional drive.

3. Social Stress

Some young people can get highly hung-up on the extremes of continuous contact - the mobile phone offers either no contact or too much contact - possibly even unwanted contact. Stress can be caused by both sender's and recipient's frustrations. Young people expect a mobile phone to be immediate - fool proof and available at all times

The effects on children

- There is huge peer pressure to have a mobile phone with the latest technology and design
- The ease by which mobiles are available increases the demand - 'pay as you go' accessibility
- Parents accept this because they convince themselves of the safety benefits
- The stress of maintaining communications for some is hard
- The stress of wanting an equal flow of contact can be self destroying if it does not materialise
- Owning a mobile phone, for some, provides a status among friends and a degree of self worth
- On occasions there may be unwanted communications and even stalking which adds a further pressure on the individual.

The need to feel self worth is true to growing up but cannot be gained through the ownership of a mobile phone. All young adults want to have friends, want to communicate with them more so than their immediate family, feel a sense of worth through the friends they have etc.. but all young adults need to find their way through these feelings because of who they are, not what they own or how they conduct themselves.

The effects on the family

The teenage years are difficult for any family - but the best way of getting through them is communication, to accept, to laugh, to discipline where necessary and with the knowledge that you will get through it. As parents it is important to manage the situation as it occurs. Listening and understanding both points of view is the best way forward.

Typically teenagers tend to be insular amongst their own age group believing that they have their life sorted! This is normal but what we are talking about and what parents have asked us for help on is when an obsession like the mobile phone stops your child from being interested in anything else. When their studies, sports and other interests and activities are affected, when they are loosing sleep because they feel the need to maintain contact through the night, when they lie about how they are paying for the privilege of the use of the mobile phone. Of course there were obsessions before the mobile phone but the fulfilment and confidence gained through the ease of contact has moved the situation onto a new level.

Parents should be aware of obsessional characteristics in their child which may not be just restricted to mobile phone usage.

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The scientists say, keeping in continuous contact with people is addictive and that is what mobile phones encourage and more so the 'perceived' cheapness of text messaging. Clever marketing through the 'pay as you go' opportunity has opened mobile phones to the young, eeds the personal requirements of a teenager - they provide a sense of no contracts no guarantees and because of this, it is one of the most expensive ways to pay.

One observer commented that the cigarettes found in the hands of many of today's teenagers are being replaced by an equally worrying habit - albeit healthier - the mobile phone. It is not surprising therefore that the mobile phone industry has adopted very similar marketing tactics to the tobacco industry. It is the latest 'cool thing'

What should parents do?

1. If you are thinking of buying your child a mobile phone try to set the rules from the start.

- When they can use it
- How it will be funded and what will be the frequency of 'top ups'
- Where it should be kept for both usage and safety reasons
- Who to give your phone number to
- Only to reply to people you know
- The purpose of ownership - the privilege of ownership and the reasons why not to abuse it
- What will happen if they do abuse it - ie. do not abide by the rules
- Make the ownership of the mobile phone fun and maintain parental 'chat' about it - who called, getting to understand the ways of using it etc.

2. For parents whose children already have a mobile phone and are worried about it's use then we suggest you start by explaining your concerns to your child. Remember, try not to accuse but instead talk from your perspective - when this happens we (the family) are concerned because

- Why you are worried.
- What has caused this concern
- How it makes you and the family feel
- Your concerns from a wider more worldly view point
- What you would like them to do
- If there is little or no response it is important to lay down a set of family rules - you may use your phone at this time for this period of time - we will need to take the phone away for a period of time/ for ever

3. If your concerns over the usage of mobile phones is stretched to believing your child is verging on the criminal as in this parents statement, then you may need to be very tough indeed and perhaps get some professional help in finding out the cause behind such extreme behaviour.

'I discovered our daughter had been using my credit card without my permission to buy more mobile airtime for her phone. We were furious and concerned. My daughter was becoming a criminal for the sake of using her mobile phone to keep in contact with her friends whom she saw on a daily basis anyway. She needed to feed her habit and it seemed she didn't care who she upset along the way.'

This tale suggests dependency - the mobile phone is becoming an asset that is the most important thing in their lives - they no longer can reason sensibly.

Children and adults need to be more responsible about the use of mobile phones - they are not toys but a useful tool for communicating at appropriate times. We all need to be sensible, considerate and responsible users.

Other concerns include:

Health risks (radiation)

The Department of Health issues guideline on the use of mobile phone by young people under 16. Because the head and the nervous system are still developing in the teenage years, children and young people might be more venerable than adults. It has therefore been recommended that children under 16 should be discouraged from non-essential calls. The UK Chief Medical Officer has gone further and advised parents not to let children use mobile phones.

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Driving safety regulations

Using a mobile phone whilst driving can be more dangerous than being 'over the limit' behind the wheel, but neither is safe.

Drivers' reaction times are 30 percent slower when talking on a hand-held mobile phone compared to being drunk and nearly 50 percent slower than under normal driving conditions. Using a hand-held mobile phone had the greatest impact on driving performance, but "hands free" mobile phones also affect drivers

Summary

It is exciting to be part of a growing technological world and all should enjoy its benefits, but in moderation. Children need to have agreed boundaries for mobile phone usage. Communication within families is also essential to ensure safe practice.

The future of Text Messaging

According to the Mobile Data Association 16.8 billion chargeable person-to-person text messages were sent across the four UK GSM networks in 2002. In 2003 it is expected that it will continue to grow with an estimated 55 million text messages sent every day.

Consumers are becoming more and more comfortable with the use of their mobile phone as a device for communicating with their friends, colleagues and family. Over 70% of mobile phone users now use their handsets for text messaging. Services such as sports results, betting games, and stock market news are sent directly to mobile phones. Text Messaging is seen as a medium of choice - simple, cost effective and instant yet discrete.

As the younger generation grows up they will take their texting skills with them. They will continue to educate the older generation and will also pass on their skills to their children and grand children. Text Messaging will become embedded into generations of family and friends