

BUYING A MOBILE PHONE? DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GETTING? A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS



You can now access the Internet on most mobile phones and whilst this access brings a world of incredible opportunities in terms of communication, interaction and entertainment, there are certain risks to children posed via the Internet. These risks include accessing potentially harmful content, such as pornography, possible dangerous contact with strangers in chatrooms and commercial pressures like spam and intrusive advertising.

The UK Mobile Operators have recognised these risks and have taken steps to help you protect your child from potentially harmful content accessible via your mobile phone. There are also things you can do to block premium rate calls and texts.

This guide written by children's internet charity, Childnet International, gives you a **checklist of important questions to ask your Mobile Operator** 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 phones safely.

1. SAFETY ADVICE

QUESTIONS TO ASK	BACKGROUND
 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.	Your mobile operator is committed to providing you with information and advice on safe use of their service. Be sure to check that they are keeping you informed.

2. INTERNET ACCESS

QUESTIONS TO ASK	BACKGROUND
 Does this phone have Internet access?  Is there a filter to help block Internet content that is potentially harmful for children?  Is the filter switched on? If no, can you switch it on (please)?	All the UK Mobile Operators have to provide an Internet filter on their phones to help block accessing material that is potentially harmful to children, such as pornography. However, with most operators you will need to ask your Operator to activate the filter.

3. REGISTERING THE PHONE

QUESTIONS TO ASK	BACKGROUND
 Is the phone registered for a child or for an adult user?	Being registered as a child user will mean that you cannot access material provided by your mobile operator or its partners that is rated as 18+, ie unsuitable for children. All mobile phone users are considered to be children by their mobile operator unless or until they have proved to their mobile operator that they are 18. Proving your age is a one-off action, so if you 'inherit' a phone check with your operator whether the phone is registered as a child or an adult user.

¹ With the stated aim of helping parents keep their children safe, the UK Mobile Operators – Orange, O2, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile, Vodafone and 3 - signed up to a Code of Practice in January 2004 (see www.imcb.org.uk/assets/documents/10000109Codeofpractice.pdf) whereby they agree to certain conditions concerning the provision of new content and services on mobiles, including Internet content and services. In this Code the Mobile Operators give certain promises to users and at the same time the Code gives mobile phone users certain expectations of their Mobile Operator.

4. BLUETOOTH-ENABLED PHONES

QUESTIONS TO ASK	BACKGROUND
 Is this phone 'Bluetooth-enabled'?  How can I turn this off, or set it so the phone is not visible to others?	Bluetooth technology essentially enables your mobile phone to find and 'talk' to other bluetooth-enabled mobile phones in the vicinity, or other enabled phones to talk to your mobile. When activated on your child's mobile phone, for example, it means that your child may receive unexpected and unwanted messages from other bluetooth-enabled phone users nearby, and any personal information stored on your child's phone – for example their contact list - could be vulnerable. Switching off the bluetooth option is safer as it makes the phone 'invisible' to other bluetooth users.

5. PREMIUM RATE CALLS AND TEXTS

QUESTIONS TO ASK	BACKGROUND
 Can you put a bar on all premium rate numbers (ie all number starting with 09, or 5 digit shortcodes for premium rate texts), (please)?  If you can't bar these numbers, what services do you provide to protect the user here?	Calling premium rate numbers can be expensive. If you have a complaint about such a service you should contact ICSTIS the Premium rate service regulator, www.icstis.org.uk or 0800 500212. If you do find you have signed up for a reverse-billed premium rate service (where you pay to receive rather than send text messages, for eg ringtones or football score updates) and you do not want to continue this, then text STOP to the shortcode number you got the text from. This will end the service and your payments to it.

6. CHATROOMS

QUESTIONS TO ASK	BACKGROUND
 Can this phone access chatrooms or games where users can chat to each other?  Are these chatrooms (or games) moderated?  How are the chatrooms (or games) moderated?	Chatrooms or games (where you can chat to other users) that are provided by your Mobile Operator or its partners and which do not have 18+ age-restrictions must be moderated. Different mobile operators may have different moderation policies and systems, which may affect the level of safety, so ask your Mobile Operator about this. In Childnet's opinion, a view shared by the Home Office in their guidance issued on this subject, moderation by a person is better than purely technical moderation (a filter blocking out bad words for example). Remember that chatrooms accessed on the Internet via mobile phone (ie which are not provided by the Mobile Operator or its partners) may not be moderated.

7. NUISANCE/MALICIOUS CALLS

QUESTIONS TO ASK	BACKGROUND
 What number can I call to report receiving unwanted or abusive calls or messages?	Your Mobile Operator should have systems and procedures in place to help you deal with nuisance and malicious phone calls.

8. REPORTING ABUSE

QUESTIONS TO ASK



Where do I report abuse of service?
If for example I receive unwanted adult (18+) material on my phone while the filter is switched on, who should I report this to?

BACKGROUND

It is important to let your mobile operator know if their system is failing, both in order to protect yourself and others using the same service.

9. SPAM

QUESTIONS TO ASK



What action is your Mobile Operator taking to prevent Spam?

BACKGROUND

Your Mobile Operator will take action against spam, whether it is text, picture or e-mail. Find out what action your mobile operator is taking and report any spam received on your phone to them.