

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



36_ Useful cell phone rules

Claudia (14) comes home from school with her cell phone in her hand. When she eats, she only puts her cell phone down with grumbling, in a bad mood and spends the afternoon in her room chatting with friends. She's usually on the phone until late in the evening, and she's often online under the covers until after midnight, although her parents think their daughter has been asleep in her bed for a long time.

Many children and young people feel the same way as Claudia.

For them, the cell phone is an integral part of everyday life. They use it for chatting, surfing, gaming, watching videos, listening to music, downloading, and sometimes making calls and researching things. In addition to the purely practical things, it mainly fulfils social functions, such as maintaining friendships and networks as well as organising everyday life. Belonging to the network gives them security and recognition. Today, communication is no longer just verbal and physical, but also media. Banning cell phones would be tantamount to social uprooting.

In addition to all the positive aspects of the Internet, there are also problematic sides:

Children and young people surf the web too carelessly, sensitively posting data such as their own address, bank codes, intimate texts, pictures and videos. Dangers of viruses, hackers, download cost traps, harassment and cyber-bullying are already a reality for many youngsters. What happened before - gossip and tittle-tattle, exclusion, teasing, shaming, physical attacks - find an unprecedented way to spread via cell phones. "At home" is no longer a place of refuge as it used to be, the attacks come via SMS, chat and e-mail, often at night and to many network participants. They have fatal effects on the psyche, health and social behaviour of victims and perpetrators.

Private life becomes public

At the latest when friendships break up, intimate texts and images are often used as a weapon. Embarrassing situations or "happy slapping" (initiated brawls) are often filmed and posted online. Many young people and adults believe they don't have to follow any rules on the Internet or that they won't be tracked. It is important to know that in Italy young people are already entered in a pre-registration register for such offences, which is a considerable obstacle when looking for work later. This is where the postal police do their work.

What can parents do?

- Parents are role models, for example in observing cell phone-free times (at meals, at night, ...)
- Surf the web together with the children and give them specific instructions on how to use the internet (take the cell phone quiz with the child at www.klicksafe.de)
- Install educational and gaming programs
- Cell phones do not have to be used by youngsters of elementary school age. Experts advise waiting until the child is 13-14 years old. A simple cell phone without internet access is suitable for emergencies. At home, children can use the Internet on a family device to maintain social contacts.
- Offer child-friendly search engines!
- Communicate usage rules in a way that is understandable and acceptable, but not too restrictive.
- Educate children and young people: What not to do online? What do you not like yourself? Where does the fun stop? (80% of all emergency calls are joke calls from children!) Where is privacy violated (e.g. photos of classmates, films, acts of violence, nudes,...)?
- Raising a child to take responsibility: how can you protect yourself? Obey age limits, stop chatting when it gets uncomfortable, protect personal data, beware of money and downloads, inform parents or competent adults
- Not everything on the internet is true (from info to people, names and ages)!

Our children need trust and help

Secret controls can lead to breaches of trust - children have a right to privacy! Internet bans often have a negative effect at the relationship level, because parents who impose bans without basic knowledge are not taken seriously. Stay in good contact with your child and let him or her show you websites again and again. If a child suddenly behaves strangely, forgets food and chores, is depressed or anxious, refuses to go or walk to school... please get in touch with the school and professionals. Cyber-bullying is often behind this. Create social contacts to balance cell phone use and invite friends over at home. Good relationships with parents and friends are still the best protection.

Text: Elisabeth Kusstatscher | www.familie.it