



# Do Smart Phones = Smart Kids?

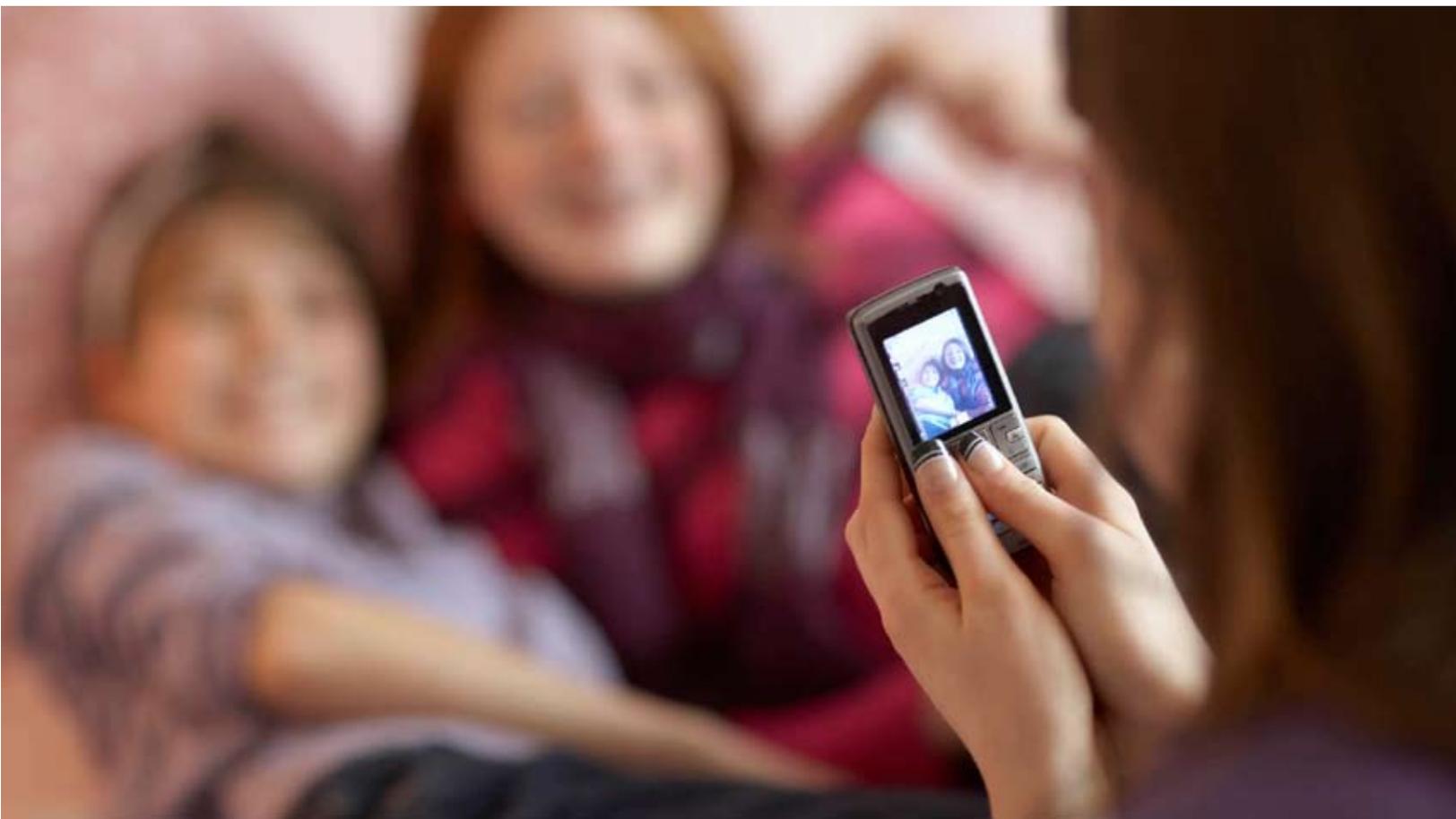
The Impact of the Mobile Explosion on America's Kids, Families, and Schools  
A Common Sense Media White Paper

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Mobile technology is dramatically changing life for all of us, but especially for the earliest adopters of all things digital — our kids. Mobile phones and devices give kids many new opportunities for entertainment, engagement, and creativity, and make it easier to stay connected — including with mom and dad. Unfortunately, the 24/7 access-anywhere world of mobile also makes parenting even more complicated, and many adults worry about the growing challenge of managing the content, applications, and connections kids now have at their fingertips.



In 1983, the first cell phones weighed 28 ounces, measured 10 inches high, and sold for thousands of dollars. Today's mobile phones are often smaller than a deck of cards, weigh less than four ounces, and are often free as part of a one- or two-year contract. Increasingly, they offer touchscreens, GPS navigation, music, video, cameras, email, and Internet browsing, not to mention the ability to download hundreds of thousands of applications and games.

In 1985, there were about 200,000 cell phone subscribers in the United States. Today, there are more than 286 million subscribers,<sup>1</sup> and nearly nine in 10 (87%) Americans own a cell phone.<sup>2</sup> More than 50 million of them own smartphones and wireless enabled PDAs.<sup>3</sup> In addition, purchases of WiFi-enabled devices such as cameras, game players, and media players, are expected to increase from 108 million in 2009 to 177 million in 2013.<sup>4</sup>

Increasingly, these handheld devices are becoming miniature computers, enabling users to access information and resources from anywhere. One sign of this change is the growth of mobile applications – 2.3 billion apps were downloaded in the past year alone, and more than five billion will be downloaded per year by 2014.<sup>5</sup>

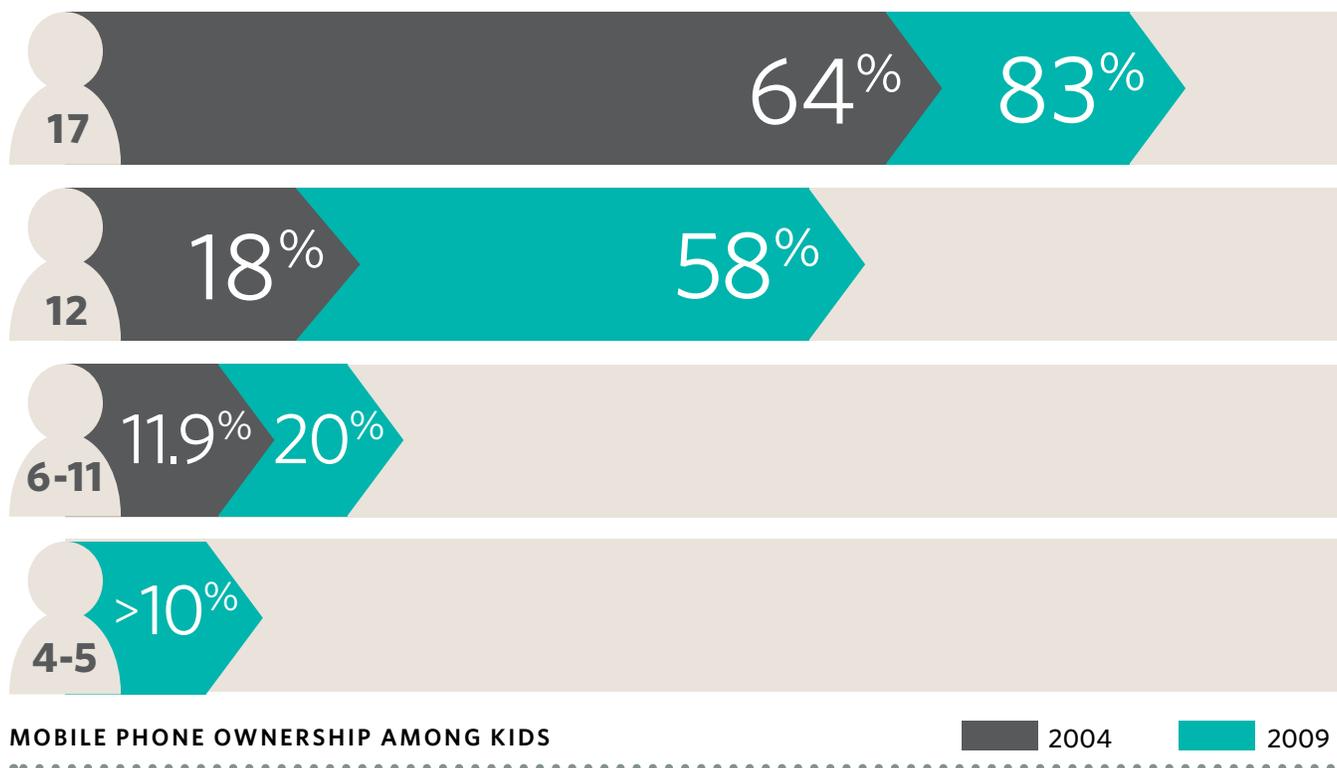
# Mobile Kids

In 2004, 45% of teens had a cell phone; by 2009, it was 75%.<sup>6</sup> The fastest growth has been among younger teens:

- In 2004, just 18% of 12 year olds had a cell phone, compared to 64% of 17 year olds.
- In 2009, 58% of 12 year olds had a cell phone, compared to 83% of 17 year olds.<sup>7</sup>

**Mobile phone usage is also growing rapidly among younger children. Twenty percent of U.S. children ages 6-11 currently own a cell phone, up from 11.9% of children in 2005.<sup>8</sup>**

- U.S. teens (ages 13 to 17) send or receive an average of 3,146 text messages a month, and kids 12 and under send 1,146 texts per month.<sup>9</sup>
- More than a third of teens download ringtones, IM, or use the mobile web.
- About a quarter download games and applications.
- 16% use location-based services on their phones.<sup>10</sup>

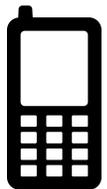




AVERAGE TEXT USAGE BY KIDS

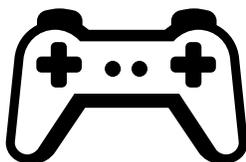
Other Digital Devices

Most teens use computers to go online, but increasingly, they're also going online with their mobile devices.



**27%**

of teen cell phone users use their phone to go online.



**24%**

of teens with a game console (like a PS3, Xbox or Wii) use it to go online.



**19%**

of teens with a portable gaming device use it to go online.<sup>11</sup>

Just over half of teens (51%) own a portable gaming device like a PSP or a Gameboy. Younger teens are more likely to have them (66% of 12-13 year olds, compared to 44% of 14-17 year olds).<sup>12</sup> Kids can use these devices to download TV shows and movies, surf the web, listen to music, and send instant messages.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, while the iPod Touch is not a smartphone, it enables users to text, access the web, and download apps. Sixty-five percent of iPod Touch users are 17 or younger.<sup>14</sup>

# How Kids Are Using Mobile Tech

## The Good News

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A variety of recent studies have shown that integrating technology into schools can boost achievement in mathematics, literacy, and reading.<sup>15</sup>

- In four North Carolina schools in low-income neighborhoods, ninth- and 10th-grade students were given smartphones and special software to help with their algebra studies. They used the phones for a variety of tasks, including recording themselves solving problems and posting the videos to a private social networking site for their classmates. Students with the phones performed 25% better on the end-of-the-year algebra exam than students without the devices in similar classes.<sup>16</sup>

- A new study in the U.K. found that text messaging helped children develop “phonological awareness” which is key to learning how to spell. The kids who text more often (especially those who use abbreviations such as “plz” or “4ever”) showed higher scores on spelling exams. Researchers also found that kids who received mobile phones at younger ages were better at reading words and identifying patterns of sound in speech.<sup>17</sup>



- Teachers in Escondido Union School District in California are exploring the use of iPods to improve student reading. Students can record and then hear themselves reading, which helps them work on fluency and comprehension. Teachers can import student recordings and create time-stamped digital portfolios to track progress. Data from a group of fourth-graders has found that using iPods to practice reading resulted in more rapid improvement rates compared with a control classroom.<sup>18</sup>

More generally, there are a number of ways that mobile devices can improve education:

- Mobile devices allow students to gather, access, and process information outside the classroom, and can help bridge school, afterschool, and home environments.
- Because of their relatively low cost, handheld devices can help level the digital playing field, reaching and inspiring children from economically disadvantaged communities.
- Mobile devices can support personalized learning experiences, and adapt to the individual needs of learners.<sup>19</sup>

# The Bad News

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## Cyberbullying

**43% of kids admit to being cyberbullied, but only 10% tell someone about it.**

Cyberbullying is when someone repeatedly harasses, mistreats, or makes fun of another person online or while using cell phones or other electronic devices.

- Cyberbully 411 reports that 40% of kids say they were cyberbullied through instant messenger services; 30% said it happened on social networking sites; 29% said it happened while playing online games.
- Cyberbullying is especially prevalent in middle school-aged kids (9-14).<sup>20</sup>



## Sexting

**22% of teen girls (ages 13-19) say they have sent nude or semi-nude photos or video of themselves, either online or via text messages.**

- Messages are even more prevalent than images. Thirty-nine percent of teen boys and girls say they have sent sexually suggestive messages (text, email, IM), and 48% of teens say they've received them.
- Kids who sext may face criminal charges for child pornography or other violations, and could be required to register as sex offenders.<sup>21</sup>



## Distracted Driving

**In 2007, AAA reported that 21% of fatal car crashes involving teens between the ages of 16 and 19 were the result of cell phone usage.**

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, in 2008 there were 5,870 fatalities and an estimated 515,000 injuries in police-reported crashes involving driver distraction, and the highest incidence of distracted driving occurs in the under-20 age group.<sup>22</sup>

- 34% of texting teens ages 16-17 say they have texted while driving.
- 52% of cell-owning teens ages 16-17 say they have talked on a phone while driving.<sup>23</sup>



## Cheating

**More than 35% of teens with cell phones admit to using their cell phones to cheat.**

Kids have always found ways to cheat in school, but now they have more powerful tools.

- 45% of teens say texting friends about answers during tests is a serious cheating offense, but 20% say it's not cheating at all.
- 69% of schools have policies that don't permit cell use, but more than half of all kids ignore them.<sup>24</sup>



## Location-Based Technology

**Mobile phones with GPS capabilities can expose a kid's exact location. Many new programs and apps have been developed that allow kids to announce their whereabouts. This creates physical safety concerns.**

If a kid shares location info to "friends," that information can be passed along to unintended audiences. Privacy concerns are also a huge issue. Marketers use geolocation technology to target kids with promotions. A child's purchasing habits will be registered and personal data collected. Location-based technology raises several critical questions and concerns:

- Should mobile geolocation data, persistent IP addresses, and other identifying information be protected for children under age 13 – in the same way that name, age, gender, and address information are protected today?
- Do teens understand how their personally identifying information will be used, and do they need additional protections?
- Will this identifying information be used to target kids and teens with new behavioral advertising and marketing campaigns?

# Balancing the Good and Bad

Mobile phones and devices can bring new educational and creative opportunities for children. They can also bring increased distractions, and decreased privacy. But whether their impact is positive or negative, mobile phones and portable digital devices are not going away. As parents, teachers, industry leaders, and policymakers we must take steps to ensure that kids can access the benefits of mobile technology and digital media, while protecting them from potential negative consequences.

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## What Parents Can Do

- Think carefully about whether – and when – your kids need mobile phones and devices, and what phone capabilities, like cameras and texting, are appropriate for their age. Make sure your kids know your rules about when, how, and how often to use them.
- Know the new ways that kids use mobile phones, including creating, accessing, and distributing video, and downloading apps and games. If you don't know what they're doing, you won't be able to set the rules.
- Talk with your kids about privacy and the ways that mobile phones and location-based services can give out their personal information.



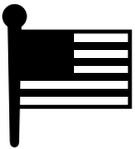
## What Educators Can Do

- Teach Digital Literacy and Citizenship in K-12 schools, so that all kids learn how to use digital – and mobile – devices in smart, effective, and responsible ways.<sup>25</sup>
- Establish clear rules about when, where, and how students can – and cannot – use mobile phones and devices at school, and encourage dialogue about why mobile use needs to be limited and responsible.
- Encourage innovative approaches to using mobile devices to expand positive opportunities for learning, creativity, and communication.



## What Industry Can Do

- Take increased responsibility for the programs and apps they distribute.
- Use the same tech innovations that let kids access programs and platforms to enable parents to access tools that help them manage their kids' use of mobile devices.
- Develop better parent controls for mobile devices, and make them easier for parents to understand and use.
- Enable parents to access independent ratings and parent advice through mobile devices – for mobile apps and all the other services that kids can now access.



## What Policymakers Can Do

- Build digital literacy and citizenship programs in schools and communities, including professional development for educators, and a new Digital Literacy Corps.
- Update the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and other legislation to reduce barriers to students using personal mobile devices on school networks, so that schools can decide how to set rules that encourage learning in school, at home, and in between.
- Outlaw texting while driving by all drivers and any use of cell phones by teen drivers.
- Update the Children's Online Privacy and Protection Act (COPPA) to address mobile technology and ensure that children's privacy is protected on all media platforms.

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**Mobile phones and devices are becoming mini-computers that enable kids to access every portal and platform of the digital world — from home, school, or any place in between. Mobile devices and digital media are changing the ways that kids live and learn — and the changes can create opportunities and pose potential dangers.**

**Kids today are growing up in a mobile, digital world, and we need to give them the digital literacy skills and judgment to access the benefits — and avoid the dangers — of this world. Smart phones will change kids' lives. We all share a responsibility for making sure the changes are positive.**

# Who We Are

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

More than 1.3 million people visit the Common Sense website every month for age-appropriate media reviews and parenting advice. Tens of millions more access our advice and information through our distribution partnerships with leading companies like Comcast, DirecTV, Time Warner Cable, Cox Communications, Facebook, Yahoo, Google, Apple, Disney, Netflix, Barnes & Noble, Best Buy, and others.

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