

RAISING KIDS

Does Giving Your 10-Year-Old a Cell Phone Increase the Risk of Bullying?

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Do your kids have cell phones yet? This is a hot topic and can be a point of [debate among parents](#) depending on their views. I dread the moment when I have no other choice but to give in and let my kids get their own cell phones. I am holding off as long as possible because of the many concerns I have for [electronic distraction and addiction to cyberbullying](#).

My son is currently in fourth grade and I am no way near being ready for him to have a cell phone, even if some of his classmates are starting to get them. On average, kids in the U.S. receive their first smartphone just a few months after their 10th birthday. Time is ticking for me, as my son turns 10 at the end of the school year. This is certain to become a tense issue in my home soon enough.

However, I know I am on the right track with my cautious approach because a new study presented at the American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition indicates how third and fourth graders who own cell phones are more likely to be cyberbullied.

Researchers collected survey data from 4,584 students in third, fourth, and fifth grades between 2014 and 2016. Across all three grades, 49.6 of students reported owning a cell phone. The older the student, the more likely they owned a cell phone: 59.8 percent of fifth graders, 50.6 percent of fourth graders, and 39.5 percent of third graders. Of the entire group of children assessed, 9.5 percent acknowledged that they had been a victim of cyberbullying in the past. Yet, the children who owned a cell phone were significantly more likely to be a victim of cyberbullying, especially in third and fourth grade.

The researchers concluded that the heightened risk of cyberbullying related to having a cell phone may be linked to increased opportunity and vulnerability from having the technology in their hand 24/7. The spread of technology has made bullying so much easier because it has removed the traditional barriers of time and space between bullies and their victims. Constant access to social media and texting increases the number of online interactions that children have with their peers, which makes them vulnerable to hate-filled behavior, negative comments and images, or hurtful and abusive messages.

Cyberbullying is a troubling phenomenon and not something to be taken lightly. Nearly 43 percent of kids have been bullied online, according to PACER, the organization that developed National Bullying Prevention Month. Cyberbullying is now the single largest type of bullying, and 25 percent of kids who have been bullied say they have experienced it more than once.

Why are kids being bullied? According to TeenSafe data, 72 percent of children are cyberbullied because of their looks, 26 percent of victims are chosen due to their race or religion, and 22 percent of harassed children feel that their sexuality was the cause of the bullying. Other reasons include weak athletic ability, intelligence level, strong artistic skills, strong morals, refusal to join the crowd, or having a small build (i.e., too short or too thin).

The more we can eliminate the chances of our children being exposed to nasty comments online, the safer and happier they will be – even if that means they do not get to sport the latest and greatest cell phone. Wait Until 8th is a campaign set up to encourage parents to delay giving their children a cell phone until at least eighth grade. The more parents who take the pledge to wait until at least eighth grade, the easier it will be for all children so they will feel less peer pressure to have their own phone. According to the campaign’s website:

“Smartphones are distracting and potentially dangerous for children yet are widespread in elementary and middle school because of unrealistic social pressure and expectations to have one. These devices are quickly changing childhood for children. Playing outdoors, spending time with friends, reading books and hanging out with family is happening a lot less to make room for hours of snap chatting, instagramming, and catching up on You Tube.”

I know I will be taking the pledge!

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