

Message from Attorney General Jim Hood



Most teens today have a cell phone, and technology makes most cell phones a hand-held computer. Today's "smart phone" can be used for surfing the internet, game playing, instant messaging, photo swapping and much more.

For us parents, cell phones can provide a sense of security because we can stay in touch with our children when they are away. However, this same technology poses some dangers, and it is important for us to open up the lines of communication with our teens about those dangers.

As the parent, you have a right and duty to review what your child is doing and saying on their cell phone. Their language just may surprise you.

I hope this guide will provide you with the information you need to get this important conversation started. Parents, please pay special attention to the tips located in the gray boxes.

More resources can be found on our website at agjimhood.com.

Where to Find More Information

Connect Safely

<http://www.connectsafely.org/>

Safe Kids

www.safekids.com/cell-phone-safety-tips/

National Crime Prevention Council

<http://www.npc.org/topics/cell-phone-safety-1>

Wired Safety

<http://www.wiredsafety.org/>

Family Online Safety Institute

www.fosi.org

Webwise Kids

www.webwisekids.org

Child Lures Prevention

Tips for Parents on Sexting
[www. Childluresprevention.com/pdf/Sexting-Parents.pdf](http://www.Childluresprevention.com/pdf/Sexting-Parents.pdf)

Office of the Attorney General State of Mississippi

P.O. Box 220
Jackson, MS 39205

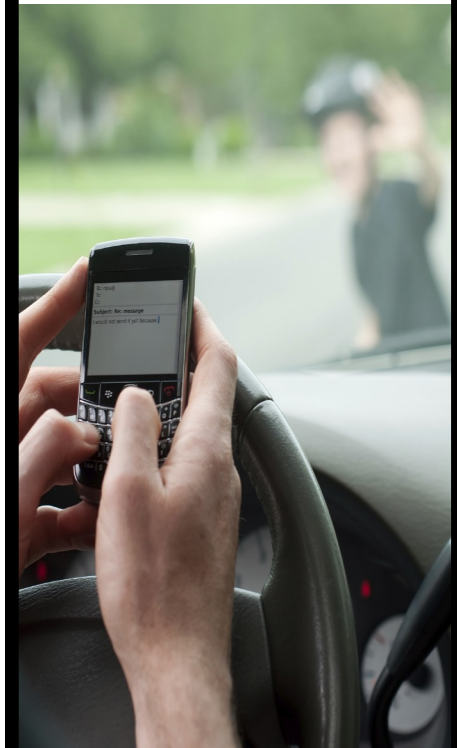
Phone: 601.359.3680
E-mail: msago5@ago.state.ms.us

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Cell Phone Safety Guide

For Adults & Teens



Prepared by the
Office of the Attorney General
State of Mississippi

www.agjimhood.com

Parent's Guide

- Talk to your child about his/her cell phone activities and set clear boundaries for what they are and are not allowed to do.
- Consider instituting a curfew for phone usage so that your child is not tempted to stay up late and talk or text.
- Review your cell phone records for unfamiliar numbers and late night calls and texts.
- Remind your child that anything shared in a text can be easily forwarded and shared.
- Learn texting acronyms such as "POS" (Parent Over Shoulders) so that you can identify troublesome messages.
- Explain to your child that **sending a sexually-explicit message of someone under the age of 18 may be considered distribution of child pornography and receiving it may be considered possession of child pornography.**
- Familiarize yourself with your cell phone's security settings/parental controls and USE THEM.
- Check with your cellular service provider on getting GPS on your child's phone to keep up with your child, but make sure your child is not using it to tell his/her friends his exact physical location (known as social mapping).
- Set the example! According to a survey by Liberty Mutual Insurance and Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), 60% of teens polled said their parents have been their biggest influences when it comes to driving.

Bullying

Mississippi recently passed a statute which includes cyberbullying. The definition of "bullying" now includes events involving electronic communication, such as harassing emails or threatening messages online. Under the new law, bullying occurs when a victim reasonably perceives that he or she has been threatened or harassed. It does not matter whether the bully intended to threaten or harass the victim.

Mississippi cyberstalking laws make it a felony to use electronic communication to threaten bodily harm to a person, or harm to his or her family or property, communicate repeatedly in order to threaten, terrify or harass a person, or to make false statements concerning death, injury, illness, criminal conduct or indecent conduct. The law also prohibits knowingly allowing anyone else to use your computer or other device to threaten, harass, or make false statements. **A conviction can lead to a maximum fine of \$5,000 and up to two years in prison.** (Miss. Code Ann. 97-45-15).

Parents Note: If your child is the victim of cyberbullying: 1) Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyberbullying, 2) do not erase the messages or pictures. Save them as evidence. Take a photo of the evidence. 3) Contact the Cyber Crime Unit of the Attorney General's Office (601-359-3680) and your child's school.

Sexting

Sexting is the act of sending sexually-explicit images or messages to someone via mobile phone, social networking sites, and/or email. According to a recent study, 20% of teenagers have sent a nude or nearly nude image of themselves. Forty-eight percent of teenagers say they have received such messages. (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, Oct. 2008).

Understand that sexting is wrong and there are legal consequences. A sexually-explicit image of someone under the age of 18 may be considered child pornography. If you receive such an image, you could be charged with possession of child porn. If you send such an image, you could be charged with distribution of child porn.

Sexting is a crime punishable by a five-year minimum mandatory sentence for sending nude photos of persons under 18 years of age.

No matter how great peer pressure may be, the humiliation of an illicit photo getting out is much worse. **Once a photo is posted online, it stays online.**

Parent's note:

- Talk to your child about how to respond if someone is pressuring them to send a sexually explicit picture.
- Remind them there are legal consequences in addition to those you would impose, such as losing cell phone privileges.
- Monitor your child's activities and messages, and remind them that you will occasionally check their cell phones.
- Tell your child to delete any sexual photos that may have been forwarded to them.

Distracted Driving

A new bill signed into law in Mississippi in 2009 mandates that teens under 18 with an intermediate license (unsupervised driving during certain hours) or learner's permit (supervised driving at all times) cannot text friends and family while they are behind the wheel.

The law provides for a misdemeanor charge and a fine of up to \$500 for teens caught texting and driving. If the teen is involved in an accident and is texting, the fine increases to a maximum of \$1,000.

Taking your eyes off the road for even one second can result in an accident so NEVER read or text while driving. If you must do so, pull over and do so while the vehicle is stationary, but be careful when pulling over. Be sure your car is out of the line of traffic, keep your doors locked and do not stop in dangerous areas.

ADULTS: Resist taking a cell phone call while you are driving. If you must do so use a "hands-free" device for your cellular device. It will allow you to keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.

Emergency situations

- Make sure that 911 is programmed into your phone's memory.
- List next of kin by their relationship to you, such as "dad" or "mom" in order to help emergency officials call from your phone in the event you are disabled.