Cell Phones at School: Should They Be Allowed?

by Maya Cohen

The question of whether cell phones should be allowed in schools has been hotly debated over the years. The reality is, bans on cell phones are hard for schools to enforce. A 2010 Pew Internet & American Life Project study found that 65 percent of cell-owning teens at schools that completely ban phones bring their phones to school every day anyway.

Most schools now allow students to have cell phones but try to require them to be turned off during class because they can be disruptive and distracting (the Pew study found that 43 percent of all teens who take their phones to school say they text in class at least once a day). So, before you add your child to your family plan, read the pros and cons of allowing cell phones in school:

The Pros

- You can be in touch with your children, and know their whereabouts. (The Pew study noted that 48 percent of parents use the phone to monitor their child's location.)
- Your kids can reach you in the event of an emergency, and vice versa.
- If in danger, your children can reach the authorities or a medical provider.
- Phones can be silenced during class or study periods, and active only in appropriate places.
- Cell phones create a convenience that was previously unavailable. With cell phones, you can easily reach your kids for any reason: to ask them questions, change plans, or to simply say hello.

The cons

- Students often forget to turn off their phones in class, and ringing noises or text-message alerts disrupt learning.
- Even if set to silent, cell phones can still cause distraction, since text messaging has become a high-tech method of passing notes in school.
- In the event of a widespread crisis, rampant cell phone use can overload communication systems and render them inoperable.
- Student cell phone networks add to the spread of rumors and misinformation, which can be harmful during a widespread crisis.
- Mobile phones with a connection to the Internet (therefore, Facebook and Twitter) can be even more of a distraction and can be used for cyberbullying.
- Phones can be used as cheating devices during exams.
- The long-term physical effects of cell phone use are still undetermined.