

Mobile Phone Use in Schools

There is a conundrum that exists in relation to mobile phones in schools, particularly primary schools. On the one hand, parents (and their children) achieve peace-of-mind and security from knowing they can be reached by their children and vice versa. On the other hand the teachers, who are responsible for the children in their care, are only too well aware of the myriad potential problems created by having phones on school grounds. Getting the right balance has, in the past, been extremely difficult.

Most of the problems experienced by schools, and by parents, in relation to mobile phone use by school children stem from full-function phones which have access to data or value added services.

For example, it has been well-established that many of the shock mobile phone bills (sometimes hundreds of dollars in a 48 hour period) parents receive are as a result of their child downloading ring-tones, phone wallpaper and music, or accessing the internet from their phone or calling premium service numbers (1900 numbers).

The most frequently reported concerns with phones in school grounds involve:

- School yard bullying, or phone theft, sparked by one child coveting the latest and greatest, full-function, expensive, hi-tech phone owned by a peer.
- Downloading and distribution of questionable or illegal graphic content to the phone.
- Inappropriate use of the phone camera for shots or videos that violate other's privacy.
- Use of the phone, or text messaging, for cheating.
- Disruption of teaching time by interruption from calls or text messages.

As concerned parents of primary school children ourselves, we realised that the first step in overcoming these problems (and the attendant bill shock issue) was to limit the functionality of the phone itself.

In November 2006 we released the Gecko phone which is a limited function, parentally-controlled phone designed specifically for primary school aged children.

The Gecko has no camera, no facility for text messaging, does not allow downloads of ring-tones or music, has no internet access and does not allow any sharing or download of visual images. In fact all the Gecko does is make and receive telephone calls!

The Gecko has no number keys on its key pad. It does have "Call Mum" and "Call Dad" hot-buttons. Parents control the phone (via PIN protection) and program in a maximum of 22 numbers (in addition to the "000" emergency number which is a separate button on every Gecko phone). The phone can be restricted to only receive calls from the same 22 numbers.

Because the Gecko is parentally-controlled it is useless in the hands of a child for whom it is not intended, so theft and bullying is potentially eliminated. Since it has no value-added services available from it, the cost of use is minimal. It does not allow access to inappropriate content and, since it has no camera, cannot allow the creation of any inappropriate content.

Since its sole use is telephone calls, it is most useful at times when parents and their children are trying to make a necessary, practical connection with each other. For example, when a parent is running late to make a pick-up, or when a distressed child is reaching out to their absent parent.

We recognise that a limited-use handset is not the sole solution and so Gecko also engages in, and supports, teaching kids about responsible use of mobile phones.



GECKO™ Pack

- ◀ GSM 900/1800 MHz transceiver
- ◀ Software programmed for Australian regulation with Gecko animation
- ◀ SIM card
- ◀ Battery charger with Australia compatible plug
- ◀ Parent and Kid user manual
- ◀ Clamshell packaging
- ◀ Backpack Clip



This Gecko
pics is actual size



Mobile phones for mobile kids