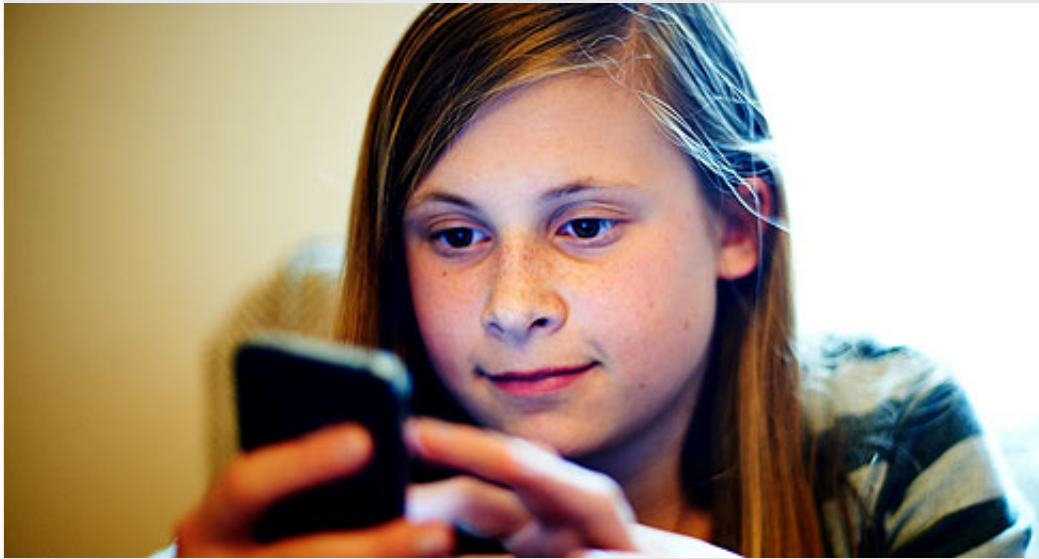


Debate!



Most cell phone companies design models especially for kids. But parents are usually the ones buying the phones, and paying the bill. According to a July 2012 study, 56% of parents of children ages 8 to 12 have given their children a cell phone. The percentage goes up with age. The study, by ORC International for the National Consumers League (NCL), basically proves what many people already assumed: many kids, if not most, have their own cell phones.

According to a recent YouthBeat survey, 12 is the magic number. It is the most common age for kids to get their first cellphone. But 13% of children ages 6 to 10 already have one. That's more than one out of every 10 kids.

Pro-cell phone people, including many parents, note that cell phones help kids keep in touch with their friends and families. They believe that cell phones are an important tool in an emergency. Kids can stay connected with their parents at all times, whether it's to ask for a ride home from soccer practice or to receive a good-luck text message moments before a big game. Plus, some people say having a cellphone helps teach kids to be responsible. Some cell phones designed for kids can be controlled with settings that allow the phone to only be used in parent-approved ways. What's the harm in that?

But other people are worried about the health and safety effects of kids' cell phones. They believe that plugged-in kids could be missing out on other activities, such as

playing outside or hanging out with friends, and that sending text messages or fielding phone calls while doing homework is bad for concentration. They say that kids are spending too much time texting instead of talking to each other. "Our brains evolved to communicate face to face," says Gary Small, a professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, in California. "A lot of this is lost with texting."

Another concern is cyberbullying, which is on the rise as more kids use e-mail and text messages to communicate. And some experts are concerned about possible health risks. They worry that radiation—or energy waves—released by cellphones could be harmful to young people. To be safe, many pediatricians advise limiting talk time.

What do you think: Do kids need their own cell phones? We want to hear your opinion. Write a 200-word response. Send it to tfkasks4you@timeforkids.com. Your response may be published in a future issue of TIME For Kids. Please include your grade level and contact information for your parent or teacher if you want your response to be published. The deadline for responding is **September 24**.

Then, be sure to vote for your opinion below!