

# **DEVELOPING AN ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY FOR MOBILE PHONES IN YOUR SCHOOL/COLLEGE**

Once upon a time, the problem of students scribbling notes under the desk and surreptitiously passing them around the classroom was the bane of a teacher's existence.

Oh, we wish that problems were still as simple! Today, with mobile phones being the essential accessory of all 10+/- year olds, the problem of texting to other students in the room, in another class, to anyone in the world, is all pervasive.

Together with this use of new technology, comes a whole new set of problems relating to access rights, privacy and harassment.

It is not appropriate for the AEU Tasmanian Branch to set out a mandatory policy to control the student use of mobile phones in all school/colleges in the state, as local conditions vary from site to site. The intention of this document is to highlight some of the problems that have occurred because of the growth in the use of mobile phones by students across Australia and to provide a sample protocol; that may help schools/colleges address these problems.

The major problems relating the use of mobile phones in the school/college environment are:

- Disruption to educational programs through the receipt and transmission of text messages as well as telephone ring tones.
- Privacy concerns mainly related to the ability of many 'phones to take photographs or record conversations in the ignorance of those being recorded.
- Loss and/or theft of 'phones.
- The "rights" of students to communicate with parents or anyone else and the "right" to receive communications at any time.
- The "rights" of school/colleges to confiscate property as a form of punishment
- The "rights" of school/colleges to insist on the deposit of 'phones in secure places for extended periods of time.

There is a wide range of protocols used by Australian schools/colleges, ranging from absolute prohibition, to complex policies and signed agreements between the school/college and parents and students.

Whatever the protocol that is in place there will always be a need for sanctions for to be applied to those who break the protocols. The nature of

these sanctions and the circumstances under which they would be applied, should be clearly stated in a document signed by the parties.

It should be noted that confiscation (temporary removal of the object from the possession of the student to a safe place) is a legitimate form of sanction. Most school/colleges place confiscated 'phones in a secure place and notify the parent(s), who must collect them.

If your school/college decides on a protocol other than the complete prohibition of mobile 'phones being brought to school/college, the following template may be used as a starting point in developing an "Acceptable Use Policy" for mobile 'phones for your school/college.

You should add, delete, or modify items to reflect the specific needs and standards of your school/college and community. Parents and students should be made aware of the school/college's Acceptable Use Policies, for example by publishing it in the school/college newsletter. In addition, there should be document signed by the parent(s) and student in which they agree to abide by the procedures agreed to in the protocol. A copy of each of these should be kept on file at your school/college.

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## **SAMPLE ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY FOR STUDENT USE OF MOBILE PHONES**

### **1. Purpose**

The increased ownership of mobile phones requires that school/college administrators, teachers, students, and parents take steps to ensure that mobile phones are used responsibly within the school/college environment. This Acceptable Use Policy is designed to ensure that potential issues (such as mobile etiquette) can be clearly identified and addressed.

**[YOUR SCHOOL/COLLEGE]** has established the following Acceptable Use Policy for mobile phones that provides teachers, students and parents guidelines and instructions for the appropriate use of mobile phones during school/college hours.

In order for students to carry a mobile phone during school/college hours, students and their parents or guardians must first read, understand and agree to the Acceptable Use Policy.

The Acceptable Use Policy for mobile phones also applies to students during school/college excursions, camps and extra-curricular activities.

### **2. Rationale**

## 2.1 Personal safety and security

**[YOUR SCHOOL/COLLEGE]** accepts that parents give their children mobile phones to protect them from everyday risks involving personal security and safety. There is also ever-increasing concern about children travelling alone on public transport or commuting long distances to school/college. It is acknowledged that providing a child with a mobile phone gives parents reassurance that they can speak with their child quickly at any time.

## 2.2 Responsibility

It is the responsibility of students who bring mobile phones onto school/college premises to adhere to the guidelines outlined in this document. The decision to provide a mobile phone to their children should be made by parents or guardians and as such parents should be aware if their child takes a mobile phone onto school/college premises.

Permission to have a mobile phone at school/college while under the school/college's supervision is contingent upon parent/guardian permission in the form of a signed copy of this policy. Parents/guardians may revoke approval at any time and must notify the school/college of their decision.

## 2.3 Acceptable Uses

Parents are reminded that in cases of emergency, the **[school/college office/other point of contact]** remains a vital and appropriate point of contact and can ensure your child is reached quickly, and assisted in any appropriate way.

At other times, while on school/college premises, students should use soundless features such as text messaging, answering services, call diversion and vibration alert to receive important calls.

## 2.4 Unacceptable Uses

Mobile phones should be switched off during classroom lessons and other educational activities such as assemblies. There will be no exceptions to this part of the policy.

Mobile phones should not be used to take photos in change rooms, toilets or in any situation that may cause embarrassment or discomfort to their fellow students, staff or visitors to the school/college.

Should there be disruptions to lessons caused by a mobile phone, the responsible student will face disciplinary actions as sanctioned by the Principal. These sanctions are listed below.

## 2.5 Theft or damage

Students are required to mark all their mobile phone clearly with their names.

In order to reduce the risk of theft during school/college hours, students who carry mobile phones are advised to keep them well concealed and not 'advertise' they have them.

Students who bring a mobile phone onto school/college premises should leave it locked away in their locker/bag as soon as they arrive.

Mobile phones which are found in the school/college and whose owner cannot be located should be handed to front office/reception.

The school/college accepts no responsibility for replacing mobile phones that are lost, stolen or damaged whilst on school/college premises or on school/college sponsored functions.

The school/college accepts no responsibility for students who lose or have their mobile phones stolen while travelling to and from school/college.

It is strongly advised that students use passwords/pin numbers to ensure that unauthorised phone calls cannot be made on their phones (eg by other students, or if stolen). Students must keep their password/pin numbers confidential. Mobile phones and/or passwords must not be shared.

## 2.6 Inappropriate conduct

- (a) Any student/s caught using a mobile phone to cheat in exams or assessments will face disciplinary actions as sanctioned by the Principal.
- (b) Any student who uses vulgar, derogatory, or obscene language while using a mobile phone will face disciplinary actions as sanctioned by the Principal.
- (c) It should be noted that it is a criminal offence to use a mobile phone to menace, harass or offend another person. As such, if action as sanctioned by the Principal is deemed ineffective, as with all such incidents, the school/college may consider it appropriate to involve the police. Hence, students with mobile phones must not engage in personal attacks, harass another person, or post private information about another person using SMS messages, taking/sending photos or objectionable images, and phone calls.

- (d) Students using mobile phones to bully other students will face disciplinary actions as sanctioned by the Principal.

## 2.7 Sanctions

Students infringing on the rules noted above will have their 'phone confiscated. It will be taken to a secure place within the school/college and the parent(s) of the students informed. Parent(s) of the student may collect the 'phone at their convenience.

Repeated infringements may result in forfeiture of the privilege of the student to bring a 'phone to school/college.

Infringements under section 2.6(c) may result in the matter being referred to the police. In such case the parent will be informed as a matter of urgency.

Effective: **[DATE FROM WHICH POLICY IS EFFECTIVE]**

## PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION

I have read and understand the above information about appropriate use of mobile phones at [school/college] and I understand that this form will be kept on file at the school/college and that the details may be used (and shared with a third party, if necessary) to assist identify a phone should the need arise (eg if lost, or if the phone is being used inappropriately).

I give my child permission to carry a mobile phone to school/college and understand that my child will be responsible for ensuring that the mobile phone is used appropriately and correctly while under the school/college's supervision, as outlined in this document.

Parent name (print)

Parent signature

Date

Student name (print)

Mobile phone number

Student signature

Date

Teacher name (print)

Teacher signature

Date

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