

# Girlguiding South West England

## Guidelines on the use of mobile phones in Guiding

The purpose of this document is to provide leaders with guidance on the use of mobile phones for guiding activities. Girlguiding does not have a specific policy regarding the use of mobile phones. Girlguiding South West England recognises that it is sometimes difficult for leaders to balance the benefits of mobile phones against the needs to safeguard our members when agreeing arrangement for mobile phones.

**This document is not a policy and must not be referred to as a policy document. It is a set of guidelines created by the Girlguiding South West England Compliance Committee in discussion with County & Island Commissioners, following concerns raised by parents and leaders. It highlights points to consider as well as examples of good practice that leaders may find helpful.**

It is the responsibility of the leadership team in each unit to agree arrangements for the use of mobile phones with the girls and their parents/carers. These arrangements may change according to the type of activity e.g. unit meetings, an activity away from the meeting place, residential events both in the UK and abroad or the age of the girls. It is important that any arrangements are clearly communicated to parents.

### Helpful hints and tips to consider when agreeing arrangements for mobile phones

#### What are the benefits of mobile phones?

- Mobile phones, cameras and digital devices are now an integral part of our culture. They can enhance many guiding activities particularly with older girls and can be of considerable value in relation to personal safety.
- Parents may wish their child to bring a mobile phone to a unit meeting if they walk to and from the meeting without adult supervision, and some may want to have the ability to contact their children whenever necessary.
- Camera mobile phones are now the norm and a built-in digital camera enables users to take high resolution pictures. These can be sent instantly to other mobile phone users or email addresses. They can also be posted on the internet or in chat rooms.
- Girls love to take fun pictures of themselves and their friends enjoying guiding activities. Camera mobile phones are a quick and easy way to record what the girls do at unit meetings and enable photos to be posted on social media to promote guiding.
- There are many apps available to support individuals living with various conditions for example anxiety, diabetes, poor vision and those who need to take regular medication. Requests to use mobile phones for medical or health reasons should be considered sensitively and on a case by case basis. Girls will usually understand if a member is permitted to use a mobile phone for a specific reason.

- Allowing the appropriate use of mobile phones in guiding can provide leaders with an opportunity to help the girls to use mobile phones responsibly and understand both benefits and risks.

#### **What are the risks associated with mobile phones?**

- Mobile phones on guiding activities can be a distraction and their use can prevent the owner and others from benefiting from the programme on offer.
- There is a potential for mobile phones to be misused. They can become an instrument of bullying or harassment directed against girls.
- Young members may inadvertently gain access to inappropriate materials.
- Confiscating phones without warning can lead to confrontations with girls and parents.
- Peer pressure may develop over ownership of latest/more sophisticated devices.
- Mobile phones that are lost or stolen can cause distress to both the girls and leaders. Girls and their parents/carers should be informed that girls who bring mobile phones to any guiding activity do so at their own risk- mobile phones are not covered by Girlguiding insurance.
- Many popular social media platforms have age restrictions to protect young people. As members of Girlguiding we must comply with all applicable UK laws and guidance and whilst participating in guiding activities we must ensure that the girls do the same.
- It is difficult to control the type of photos taken by the girls during guiding activities or how these images are shared. This can be an issue regarding photo permissions and can lead to a breach of GDPR.

#### **Mobile phones on residential visits**

- Older girls participating in group activities may not always be directly supervised by a leader. Having at least one mobile phone per group can enable the girls to easily contact the leaders in an emergency.
- There is an increased likelihood of mobile phones causing problems during residential visits.
- On residential trips children often become homesick in the first few hours and unsupervised phone calls to parents made on mobile phones can result in unnecessary anxiety and worry on the parent's behalf.
- In an emergency, girls having mobile phones can cause chaos. When an emergency occurs, it is important that leaders and the home contact can ensure that accurate and timely information is provided for parents, in accordance with home contact procedures.

- Venues used for residential visits do not always have adequate facilities to charge mobile phones and sometimes there is no signal!
- When travelling abroad girls and parents should be aware of the potential for high charges for using mobile phones.

#### Examples of good practice?

- Include arrangements for the use of mobile phones as part of your unit guidelines which are agreed with all the girls. Inform parents so they can support these decisions.
- Have a box in which girls place their phones on arrival at the meeting and collect at the end. Some units allow mobile phones for a short period at the start of the meeting before they are placed in the box.
- For many girls the mobile phone is their camera. Consider providing single use cameras if mobile phones are not permitted to be taken on a residential event.
- Agree guidelines with the girls in consultation with parents & carers for residential events and ask parents to sign to say they agree them - be clear of consequences if not complied with. Explain the reason for this decision.
- Here is an example of the text of a reminder about mobile phones that one local area in Hampshire sends to parents, prior to an international trip, along with other last-minute information. The trip was for Guides and Rangers.

*Participants may bring their mobile phones if they wish. If you are the bill payer, please make sure you are aware of the costs involved and ensure your daughter is aware of any limitations of use whilst overseas. Check roaming charges in Europe with your service provider. If you don't think your daughter can be trusted to limit use, please don't allow her to bring it. We cannot be held responsible for monitoring use. Don't forget the appropriate euro plug adapter and charger if you do bring a phone.*

*If you receive messages or calls from your daughter whilst away that suggest she is upset, please tell her to talk to us, or message us - we cannot help if we do not know there is a problem. Please do not call or message your daughter with any upsetting news from home. Please use our emergency home contact system so that we can carefully and sensitively manage the situation with your daughter overseas.*

- Rainbow and Brownies - it is recommended that there is no need for mobile phones at all on any guiding activity.