Mobile Devices and Youth Safety

Key Points

- Mobile phones are widely used by young people, and they have become an important means of communication for families worldwide. However, mobile phones also pose safety concerns such as inappropriate content, conduct, contact, and commerce.

- Microsoft offers a number of safety and privacy features on Windows Phones, including Kid's Corner, which enables parents or caregivers to create a special account for a child where they can set limits on access to apps, games, videos, and music.

- Microsoft supports efforts by mobile providers to establish voluntary industry guidelines and best practices to address such issues as content classification, location-based services, and mobile commerce, and to help customers make decisions that are best suited for their families.

BACKGROUND

In 2011, MobileYouthReport.com estimated that 1.6 billion people under the age of 30 worldwide own a mobile phone. The benefits are clear: mobile phones help parents stay in touch with their children and enable children to connect with their friends. With smartphones, they can also enjoy the Internet and the world of information available there.

Because many mobile phones provide Internet access, children and young subscribers face many of the same issues with a phone as they would with any other Internet-enabled device:

- **Inappropriate content.** Young people may stumble upon inappropriate material including hateful or sexual content by clicking a link in email, on a social network, or on the web.

- **Inappropriate conduct.** Young people may use mobile phones to harass or exploit others. Children can send hurtful, bullying messages or embarrassing images. A particular concern with mobile devices is sexting—the transmission of sexually explicit photographs and videos taken with a mobile phone camera.

- **Inappropriate contact.** Adults and other youth can use the Internet to find and approach vulnerable kids. Frequently, their goal is to develop what youth believe to be meaningful online relationships, a process referred to as grooming.

- **Inappropriate commerce.** Children can easily fall victim to phishing or other scams, and be enticed to click a flashy ad, open an enticing "free" game, or download a ringtone, which may download a virus, spyware, or other malicious software or surprise parents with expensive charges for those mobile devices.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

- Microsoft's approach to children's online safety includes technology tools; education and guidance; robust internal policies and practices for moderating content and addressing online abuse; and relationships with government, industry, law enforcement, and others to help create safer, more trusted computing experiences.

- To help promote mobile safety for children and young people, Microsoft works with industry and non-governmental organizations that include the GSM Association, CTIA – The Wireless Association, and the Family Online Safety Institute.

- Windows Phone users can control a number of features that impact their privacy by using the **Express Settings** or **Customize** options. These include features that may share information with apps such as a single setting to manage access to the Windows Location Platform.

  If the platform is turned on when a user runs a Windows Store app for the first time, Windows will ask the user whether the app may use location. Conversely, if the platform is turned off, apps cannot use the Windows Location Platform to access the user's location. At any time while using a Windows Store app, the user may easily enable or disable use of location.

- Windows Phone Kid's Corner allows parents and caregivers to pick the apps, games, videos, and music that kids can access, while protecting the adult's account from misuse.

- Microsoft works with mobile service providers and independent software companies to give families additional safety tools for mobile phones, such as content filtering, usage limits, and contact management.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- As governments address risks associated with emerging technologies and online services, they should also ensure that innovation and technology adoption aren't stifled along the way. In addition, government and industry should collaborate to establish safety principles and help offer a more secure online environment for youth.

- Microsoft believes that the best way to protect children from inappropriate content is through the voluntary adoption of content controls, rather than through mandatory filtering or content ratings.

- Microsoft supports efforts by mobile providers to establish voluntary industry guidelines and best practices that address issues such as content classification, location-based services, and mobile commerce to help families make informed decisions about their safety.

- Because mobile devices can be effective tools for learning, Microsoft encourages governments to work with information and communications providers, online safety organizations, and school districts to promote safety curricula and address mobile safety.

Helpful Resources

Microsoft Safety & Security Center safety guidelines for the whole family
www.microsoft.com/security/family-safety

Kid's Corner for Windows Phone
aka.ms/Kids-Corner

The Family Online Safety Institute
www.fosi.org

Coalition of mobile providers in the United Kingdom promoting social responsibility in the mobile phone industry
www.mobilebroadbandgroup.co.uk/