

CELLPHONES & SCHOOL SAFETY:

A quick scan of the headlines highlights what we all know—students are facing a social, psychological, and academic crisis. Mental health experts believe that cell phones are at the root of this issue and emphasize the urgent need to limit the time young people are spending online.

In 2023, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released an [advisory](#) on social media and youth mental health stating that up to 95% of young people between ages 13-17 report near constant use of social media. Excessive use—over three hours daily—raises risks of depression, anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and exposure to harmful content. And students' use of smartphones in school leads to lower grades, increased cyberbullying, and a higher rate of behavioral incidents.

PARENTAL CONCERNS:

IS MY CHILD SAFER IN AN EMERGENCY IF THEY HAVE A CELL PHONE?

Many parents recognize the tremendous benefits of a phone-free education, but still have some concerns over safety. They worry about being able to contact their child in an emergency or how their child can call 911.

While these concerns are more than understandable, top safety and security experts agree that smartphones do not improve student safety and can create dangerous distractions themselves. These safety experts warn that cell phone use during emergencies can actually hinder response efforts in many ways.

"The last thing we want is students on their cell phones in the midst of an emergency," says former Akron Public Schools Safety Director and Yondr School Safety Partner, Don Zesiger. "They should be taking direction from the principal, the teachers, and the leaders in the school to get them to a place of safety."

Zesiger also emphasizes the importance of a phone-free school policy to mitigate misinformation and its consequences.

"Fake social media posts threatening violence create panic and anxiety in all of us," says Zesiger. "Law enforcement researches all threats as if they are real and exercises due diligence to make sure our students are safe. This requires a tremendous amount of time and resources. A phone-free school limits the opportunity for bogus social media threats to occur during the school day and allows students and teachers to stay focused on learning."

HOW CAN CELL PHONES CAUSE HARM DURING AN EMERGENCY?

- **Distraction:** Phones can distract students from listening to first responders.
- **Communication Jamming:** High call volumes can disrupt emergency coordination.
- **Noise Risk:** Phone use might reveal students' whereabouts.
- **Online Tracking Risks:** Assailants could use social media to find additional victims.

COLLABORATING WITH PARENTS ON CELL PHONE SAFETY

When administrators and parents are aligned on the benefits of a phone-free school policy, they foster a safer, more focused learning environment.

- **Safety vs. Convenience:** Instant communication isn't always safer. Parents will be more supportive of a policy when they understand this critical distinction.
- **Effective Communication Plans:** There are a number of ways to unlock Yondr pouches in emergencies—via classroom bases, go bag bases, or safety shears. Assure parents that every student maintains possession of their own Yondr pouch and phone, and it will be immediately accessible once the student is safe.
- **Follow Safety Procedures:** Encourage parents to speak to their child about what to do during an emergency, and explain how they will be able to text/call as soon as they are in a safe location.



DON ZESIGER, YONDR SCHOOL SAFETY PARTNER

Don Zesiger recently retired as the Director of Safety for Akron, Ohio Public Schools. He was responsible for implementing Yondr and many other new innovations across Akron schools to enhance safety and create a more positive educational experience for students.

Don is a graduate of the F.B.I. National Academy, has 38 years of law enforcement experience, retired as the Chief of Police in Tallmadge, Ohio, and still holds an active peace officer commission through the Summit County Sheriff's Office that allows him to continue to work part time as a school resource officer. He is a dedicated professional that is passionate about providing for the safety and security of students and staff.

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