Should Children be banned from owning a Mobile Phone?

Almost 70% of the world’s population now own at least one mobile phone. Since its invention in the 1970s, the mobile phone has changed beyond all recognition. What was once a brick-sized device, weighing two kilograms and owned by few, is now a mini computer carried with ease in the pockets of most people. Many millions of calls and approximately 15.2 million messages are sent every minute. It is treated as an essential part of everyday life and is hugely popular with adults and children alike. A recent report by Childwise found that 53% of children in the UK own a mobile phone by the age of 7 and that, by age 11, nine in ten children have their own device. However, there are many scare stories in the media, warning that mobile phones are harmful to children’s health and wellbeing.

The report by Childwise was said by the researchers to show the extent to which phones can dominate children’s lives. One newspaper report described the findings as “damning.” A number of newspapers reported that many children admitted to being fearful of being without their phone and that more than half slept with them beside their bed. It was reported that daily usage among 7-10 year olds has gone up by almost an hour a day and that children spend three hours and twenty minutes each day messaging, playing games and being online. YouTube was found to be the most popular site, with Instagram and other social networking sites becoming increasingly popular.

Some complain that children spend too much time playing video games, watching YouTube and just staring at a screen in general. They say that children are spending less time outside than they used to, as some are addicted to their screens. However, others say that children need to learn to control their own use of technology.

Some critics say that children owning phones creates peer pressure to own the latest model and puts pressure on less well-off parents. However, children will always want the latest gadget and will be subject to peer pressure about other things like clothes and other gadgets, even if phones are banned. Others say that children having phones makes them a target for muggers. However, they won’t be a target if they don’t show off their phone in public. Phones are getting cheaper and security is getting better, so there isn’t much point in stealing a phone if you need fingerprint identification to unlock the phone.

Owning a mobile phone could help children to develop a sense of responsibility for their possessions. Mobile phones are expensive and can be easily damaged, broken or lost. It is an important life skill to be able to look after belongings properly. Ownership of a mobile phone could also help children develop financial awareness and self-control. They need to be able to use data wisely and avoid running up large bills for themselves and their parents.

Some people say that cyber-bullying is a big problem among children with phones. However, most children have access to other devices at home like laptops and x-boxes and banning phones won’t remove this problem. Most schools now have anti-bullying policies and rules and so children these days are more likely to report any bullying to their teachers or parents.

Some countries have become so concerned about the use of mobiles by children that they have banned them in schools. In Ontario in Canada, the government is legislating against pupils using phones in schools to help them focus more on their learning. In France they are banning pupils from using phones altogether during school hours, whether they are in lessons or not. The French government said this was to help children focus on their lessons, to reduce social media use and socialise better, to reduce cyber-bullying and prevent phones being stolen at school.

So should the UK be doing the same as Ontario and France? The banning of mobile phones in France was for various reasons such as helping children to focus on school work and to reduce the amount of time children spend on social media. However, the Department of Education in England says that 95% of schools in England already control the use of phones in some way. Some people feel that a ban on children owning mobile phones is not realistic because, if children are told they are not allowed something enjoyable, they will almost certainly do it anyway behind adults’ backs. Some people feel that phones are part of the outside world and that young people need to be prepared for that world. Some people also point out that phones can be great educational tools.

In research carried out in Taiwan, 71.1% of guardians said the main reason for giving their children phones was for safety reasons and 68.7% said that it was because it was easy to stay in contact with their children. A great advantage of children having mobile phones is that they can contact their parents or the emergency services if needed. This could help the emergency services track down criminals, stop fires or even help hurt and sick people.

When used responsibly mobile phones can bring great benefits such as staying in contact with friends and family. They can also be used for educational purposes, such as research for school work or playing educational games like Mangahigh. They are really useful and can be used to take photos on someone’s special day and capture many wonderful memories.

In answer to the question posed above, I do not believe children should be banned from having mobile phones. While there are some positives and negatives to children owning a mobile phone, I think banning them altogether is unnecessary. Phones are a huge part of everyone’s lives and will continue to be so. The key is to ensure that they are used in a responsible way. This can be done through appropriate school policies on mobile use, parental supervision and controls and children learning to use them responsibly. When they are used in this way, the many positives outweigh the negatives.