

**Basic Skill: Cell Phone Etiquette**

**Introduction:** According to a 2013 Pew Research Study, 91% of adults have a cell phone as do 78% of teenagers (12-17). At the same time, 79% of American Citizens feel that disrespectful cell phone usage is on the rise. Conversely, only 8% feel their cell phone usage is disrespectful or annoying to others.

Clearly, cell phones are here to stay. They are a part of our society. They represent amazing technological advancements in communication, information and safety. It is arguably as big an advancement as the automobile. However, with the automobile came a set of laws, norms and expectations. This is not the case with cell phones. Why? There are many reasons, but generally speaking, what is considered rude to one person is not rude to another. Thus, there is no set standard for cell phone usage. With that being said, here are some general guidelines that will serve you well.

Before listing specific guidelines, it should be noted that **common sense** and **respect** should govern our cell phone usage. For instance, talk quietly in a small room or value face-to-face friendship more than a phone call, text or social media comment.

**Cell Phone Courtesy (public places):**

(1) People have a tendency to speak twice as loud into a cell phone than they normally do, despite cell phones having sensitive sound technology. When in public places:

- Deliberately lower your voice when speaking on the phone.
- Keep a reasonable distance (most say 10 feet) when having a conversation in public.
- If possible, text when in public places (airports, restaurants and stores).
- Tell person on the phone where you are and that you need to keep your conversations short.
- Turn down/silence your ringer and refrain from using annoying ring tones.
- Filter your language and keep personal conversations personal.
- Don't air your dirty laundry or carry on arguments on a cell phone in public.

(2) Remember that your phone has voicemail. Let voicemail do its job. Just because someone calls you, it doesn't mean you have to answer it. Likewise, just because someone texts you, you don't have to instantly read it or respond within a certain time-frame.

**Understanding Context:**

(3) Be respectful enough to understand that there are certain places and circumstance where you need to turn your phone on vibrate (waiting rooms, airports, museums, bathrooms, elevators, restaurants).

(4) Be respectful enough to understand that there are certain places and circumstances where turn your cell phone off or don't take your phone (library, job interviews, church, class, weddings, live performances).

(5) Have enough common sense to understand that your friends might have a different set of norms when out on a Friday night than when you go visit a relative.

(6) End phone calls when an employee is waiting on you (bank, restaurant, store...).

**Proper Etiquette with Others**

(7) Generally speaking, it is up to you to gauge what other people find rude or offensive, rather than it being up to others to deal with your cell phone usage.

(8) Don't interrupt a face-to-face conversation to answer a phone call or a text. Very few people want to sit in a restaurant on a date while you have a conversation with someone who is not there.

(9) If you should or must take a phone call when out with someone else, follow these rules:

- Let your date know in advance that you will need to take the phone call in advance.
- Turn the ringer to vibrate.
- Apologize and remove yourself from the situation (table, theater, waiting room...).
- Keep your phone conversation short and to the point.

**Texting Guidelines:**

(10) Just because you are not talking on the phone, please remember that many people find it rude or disrespectful when someone is texting, surfing the internet or checking social media. It is distracting and can interfere with the face-to-face communication.

(11) Avoid texting when you are doing something that requires your attention. For example, walking down the sidewalk, shopping, banking, ordering food.

(12) Take the time to ask your employer and/or your teacher what is allowed and what isn't allowed. Every job and every class has rules and norms. Know them and follow them.

(13) Use the vibrate option to avoid the noisy alerts that accompany each text.

(14) This should go without saying, but don't text and drive.

**Classroom Feedback:**

Please ask the students to provide their feedback about these guidelines. Ask them if they have examples to go with any of these points. Ask them if they have other points that should be added to the list.

**Additional References:**

Below you will find a blog I wrote about texting and another video about cell phone usage that are fun and entertaining. If time permits...

<http://www.characterandleadership.com/blog/impact-technology.html>

<http://abcnews.go.com/WhatWouldYouDo/video/cell-phone-etiquette-6953391> (6 minutes)