

## Danger of the Mind: “Give Children Cell Phones for Safety”

### *Timely Advice Arising from Real Incidents*

In 2001 “the possession rate of cell phones for high school students was 82 to 95%” (researched by the PTA and other organizations), when this data became known, American media scholars asked me, “Why do Japanese parents give a web-phone (a cell phone with built-in Internet access) to their children? In the United States we do not let children use such phones. We believe it is an unnecessary device for children.”

I could say only “because children want it.” In fact, surveys performed by the PTA and other organizations showed that the main reason for 88% of parents’ giving a cell phone to their children was “because they begged for it.” The next biggest reasons were “it is a reasonable way to keep contact with children to and monitor their activities”, “we need to find out where they are at any given time and so it sets my mind at ease” and some similar responses. In Japan, for these reasons, the cell phone demand has rapidly spread to not only high school students but also to middle or even elementary school children since 1999.

Even after my explanations, American scholars did not agree with the reasons Japanese parents gave. “That can not be a viable reason to purchase such an unnecessary and expensive item.” They further commented that “A web phone is an Internet device, so don’t you have to deeply consider the risks before permitting children to use them?”

In point of fact there are many cell phone-related criminal cases which have occurred among children and now it seems that no one is surprised by new reports of children’s illegal cell phone abuse or by their falling victims to Internet predators.

Even as I’m writing this manuscript (January 15th), the news reported that local police arrested a 36-year-old business man for an indecent assault against a 15-year-old school girl. They met on the cell phone site of “Deaikei Site” and after exchanging e-mail for a while, they planned their first date.

Children’s usage of the “Deaikei Site” from their cell phones has been a trigger to their involvement in heavy crimes in cases which have involved prostitution, rape, and even homicide. If people were unavoidably faced with these facts, there must remain no excuse for parents who say they “gave my child a cell phone for her safety.”

“It can precisely locate my child’s position,” “We can communicate with them at any time,” and other excuses for giving Internet-equipped cell phones to children are deeply suspect mindsets greatly in need of education in the reality of children’s involvement in cell phone-generated crimes. I have also heard other stories regarding child cell phone delinquency measures undertaken by the staff of schools and the police department.

Social authorities report that, “The cell phone is not same as a fixed analog line. It is

mobile. Therefore even when parents ask children for their location, the answers may not be true.” And also, “When I visit a family of a student who often skips classes, they of course say the student leaves home every day to go to school. Following my former practice when looking for delinquent students, I may go a place where in times past there used be an underground meeting spot but the student is often not there. At that time, we were often surprised to finally learn the student was at an e-mail friend’s home some distance away. Including cases of short-term runaways, we are finding it increasingly difficult to understand the sphere of children’s friendship networks.

Form the newest of several research reports, even though few in number, we find that there are now some parents who have begun to teach their children about the dangers of these incidents.

One story I would like to share is of a high school girl who related her story to our program, Teens Express, which I introduced in my last report. She told us the following story:

“When I asked to my father to purchase a cell phone for me, he taught me about the many cases of dangerous cell phone-related incidents and then requested me to explain the reason for my cell phone necessity. Then I lost my desire for one.”

Another girl who listened to the story muttered that, “My parents never told me anything like that. I wonder whether they do not worry about me?”