

This brochure has been developed as part of the **Consumer Education Programme** of the **Communications Commission of Kenya**. It was compiled as a result of a review of material from various sources and presents the current perception of the information available on mobile-phone etiquette, with particular reference to Kenya.

Introduction

Mobile phone etiquette entails the following simple guidelines, which seek to ensure that mobile phones are used safely, securely, considerately and in such a manner as not to cause offence or disruption to other people.

Courtesy and consideration for others

It is not appropriate or considerate to conduct a private conversation (and by definition ALL conversations are private) in public places (restaurants, bars, theatres, on public transport etc). To avoid causing offence to others, users should activate the 'vibrate' or 'silent' mode on their phone when in public or provide for calls to be diverted to voicemail. If a call is important, the user should leave the public area and seek a private place. Thereafter they should keep the call as short as possible (by, for instance undertaking to return the call immediately) and/or keeping their voices as low as possible. Conversations of a personal, emotional/delicate or aggressive nature should be made in private.

Unattended mobile phones

A considerate user does not leave his/her mobile phone unattended in a public place, or in the office – unless they have turned the ring tone off or to 'silent mode'.

Failure to do so:

- Causes disturbance to others
- May necessitate someone else having to take any in-coming call
- Inconveniences callers

Using a mobile-phone when driving

Using a handset (rather than headphones) when driving is dangerous because:

- It restricts the proper use of the steering wheel.
- It restricts the ability to change gear and indicate.
- It distracts the driver.

Using a handset when driving is also illegal and all users making such calls are liable to prosecution.

If calls are to be taken when driving they MUST be answered using an appropriate hands-free kit or by pulling off the road, switching off the engine and answering the call.

Timing

There are many situations in which it would be inconsiderate to allow a mobile-phone to ring (such as at a funeral, in a theatre, mid-conversation or in a business meeting). Before this can occur, the wise mobile-phone user switches the phone onto 'vibrate' or 'silent' and returns it at a later time. The majority of in-coming calls are not, in any case, imperative.

Location

Some locations are better for conversations than others; either by virtue of quality of transmission or due to noise or other distractions of a business or personal nature. A wise mobile-phone user ensures that all calls are made under optimum conditions, thus ensuring that ALL calls are made to maximum effect.

Restricted areas

A number of public places now bar the use of mobile phones, such as; private clubs, banks, cinemas and other public institutions. Such restrictions are either made known to their members or advertised by means of a sign showing a mobile

phone enclosed within a red circle with a diagonal strip across it. Users ignoring such signs open themselves to the risk of having immediate fines imposed on them – or being asked to leave the area in question.

Voice modulation

Mobile-phones have sensitive microphones, thus raised voices are not necessary; and the use of an unduly emotional or angry tone is not recommended. Similarly the ringer volume can be adjusted to suit the situation. A well informed mobile-phone user aims to attract as little attention as possible – in the interest of being considerate, polite or for security reasons.

Personal calls

Calls of a personal nature are, by definition, private and should not be made within the hearing of other people. Not only is the broadcasting of personal information distasteful to others, but it is also inconsiderate to the calling/called party.

Duration

Mobile phones generate a form of radiation known as electromagnetic energy and, whilst the levels generated by mobile phone use are understood to fall well below the limits imposed by the international watchdogs – it is always advisable to keep the use of mobile phones (particularly when they are used without a head-set) to a minimum. The wise mobile-phone user keeps conversations short, concise and confidential whenever possible.

Personal space

The considerate phone-users keep a reasonable distance from the nearby people when using their mobile phones. Such a habit respects the personal space of others and protects the content of the message and the integrity of the caller. Users are, therefore, advised against using their phones in such places as queues, on crowded buses or in other places where personal space is restricted.

Turning the phone off

Optimum mobile-phone use requires discipline and forethought. Users are advised to switch off their phones before an interview, presentation, or boardroom meeting and in such sensitive environs as; courtrooms, theatres, cinemas, places of worship. If a user expects an in-coming call when they know they will be with others/in a meeting – it is polite to inform them and ask their permission to accept the call.

Multi-tasking

Some people are adept at multi-tasking, the majority are not. It is therefore wise to concentrate on the task at hand – be it a phone-call or something else, and not to undertake more than one simultaneously.

Consideration

It is inconsiderate and potentially impolite to take an incoming call for instance, during a conversation, or during a social engagement. Such an action implies that the incoming call is more important than the real social or personal exchange and is, therefore, impolite. It is better to allow the call to be diverted to voice-mail and attend to it as soon as is considerately possible. If users find that they MUST take an incoming call on their mobile phone while they are in, for instance, a meeting – they should request permission to take the call (or otherwise excuse themselves from any implied impoliteness) and then make it as SHORT as possible. It is also considered polite to apologize once again for any inconvenience at such time as the call is completed.

Courtesy when using SMS (short-message-service)

Communicating via text messages is one of the simplest, cheapest, fastest and most effective means of communicating on a mobile-phone. It is, however, also subject to abuse. For optimum text-messaging utilization, users are advised to:

- Avoid composing SMS messages while in face-to-face communication with someone else, when driving or when walking in the street.
- Remember that SMS messages are typically informal and should not be used in formal situations or to replace normal human communication. Casual use of SMS messages diminishes its impact.
- Be aware of the tone and content of the message. SMS messages can be easily misconstrued and, in some cases, cause distress, insult and harm.
- Avoid using complicated language or abbreviations. While teenagers use a known 'short-hand', which is generally understood by them all, other people (particularly older people or new users) may be totally unfamiliar with these terms. It is better to spell out the word and be understood. Avoid slang and any words or terms that may be offensive.
- Avoid sending SMS messages at night or early in the morning since the receipt of same may disturb or irritate the recipient. In the event that users are specifically requested NOT to send messages at a certain time – this request should be honoured. Also, be considerate as to other people's schedules and/or state of mind. Whilst it may be a good time for you to send an SMS – it may not necessarily be a good time for them to receive it.

SMS bullying

Some people, especially children use mobile-phones to bully others (by sending insulting or threatening messages). In the event that you receive such communication – you are advised NOT to respond, to note the time, date and originator of the call/SMS and pass this information to the police and/or the Service Provider. Children are advised to share the receipt of such messages with their parents/guardians/mentors.

Camera phones

Some mobile phones are equipped with cameras, which permit the users to take images and to send them to others. Unfortunately incidences have occurred where inconsiderate or unscrupulous users have taken such images and used them to demean their victims. Such images can be used to bully or intimidate others, or for sexual discrimination or harassment. As with all other forms of photography, it is considered polite to ask a person if their photograph may be taken before it is taken. If the image is to be sent to others – this should also be made clear to the subject and consent sought to this effect.

Camera phones and children

Increasing incidents have been recorded of children being bullied or intimidated via the use of text-messages and/or calls to their mobile phones – either by their age mates, or by other parties. In many cases the children may not immediately inform their parents of this fact while suffering from its effect.

Need to know more?

For further information on the above topic or any other aspect of health and safety with regard to communicational equipment, please contact:

Disclaimer: while every attempt has been made to ensure that the information included in this document is accurate, it is intended ONLY as a guideline towards the safe operation of communications equipment and should not be regarded as (or used in lieu of) legal advice. The Communications Commission of Kenya will not, therefore, accept any liability for the consequences of any actions taken, or decisions made upon the information offered.

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