

SERVICE-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE NOTE

Children's services

Who should read this?

Any providers that are planning to offer services that are aimed at, or are likely to appeal to, children. Under [the Phone-paid Services Authority's Code of Practice](#), children are defined as people under the age of 16.

What is the purpose of the Guidance?

To assist providers by clarifying the Phone-paid Services Authority's expectations around the use of children's services, which the Phone-paid Services Authority defines as those premium rate services (PRS) which, either wholly, or in part, are aimed at children, or could be reasonably expected to be particularly attractive to children.

What are the key points?

The main issues for providers to consider are:

- Children are defined as people under the age of 16.
- Promotional material should state that the bill-payer's permission is required and should specify whether any age restrictions apply.
- Children's services should not advertise or promote direct appeals for children to part with money.
- Promotional material should not encourage children to use other premium rate services or the same service again.
- Children's services should not involve competitions that offer cash prizes or prizes readily converted to cash.

1. Requirements

- 1.1 All promotional material in relation to children's services should clearly indicate that the bill-payer's permission is required and should specify whether any age restrictions apply.
- 1.2 Children's services should not advertise or promote directly to children with appeals to buy or donate. Any service found to be doing so could be found to be in breach of paragraph 2.3.9 of the Phone-paid Services Authority's Code of Practice. Similarly, promotional material should not encourage children to use other premium rate services or the same service again. Providers should be aware that children can often be considered as vulnerable consumers, and so should take steps to ensure that they are not taken advantage of. Appropriate promotional material should be used at all times. For more information on promotions, please see the General Guidance Note on '[Promoting PRS](#)'.¹
- 1.3 Providers should view and consider the Notice on caps, thresholds and actions published on our website in accordance with section 3.12 of the 13th Code¹. Services aimed at, or which could be reasonably expected to be particularly attractive to children, must terminate by forced release when a maximum of £5 (inclusive of VAT), or in the case of a subscription service a maximum of £5 (inclusive of VAT) per month, has been spent.
- 1.4 Furthermore, in any given month, such services that are aimed at, or which should have been expected to be particularly attractive to children, must not charge more than £20 (inclusive of VAT) over a single monthly billing period. This restriction is placed on individual services and does not prevent young people accessing different services and making separate purchases beyond the £20 limit. We encourage service providers operating these types of services to engage with parents to help communicate the available safeguards available in the market to protect consumers from unexpected high bills.
- 1.5 Children's services should not involve competitions that offer cash prizes or prizes readily converted to cash.

2. Determining whether a service is targeted at children

- 2.1 In determining whether a PRS has been targeted at children, or is likely to be particularly attractive to them, the Phone-paid Services Authority will consider each incident on a case-by-case basis. In doing so, the following factors are likely to be considered:
 - Data which indicates how many readers, viewers, or listeners of a publication, broadcast, or other media where the service is promoted, are children;
 - The style, content, and composition of the promotional material (i.e. does it contain factors likely to make it particularly attractive to children, or which would suggest children had been targeted?).

¹ The first such Notice was published on 26 March 2015 ahead of the launch of the 13th Code – the latest version can be found on our website here:

<http://psauthority.org.uk/-/media/Files/PSA/For-Businesses/Your-phone-paid-service/Code-of-Practice/NoticeofSpecifiedServiceChargesandDurationsofCalls.ashx?la=en>