Modeling good technology use

I was teaching a parenting class recently and a parent announced proudly that her five-year-old daughter had a cell phone. Other participating parents, in disbelief immediately asked why.

During the discussion, the parents admitted the next youngest child with a cell phone was 10. Most parents indicated they wanted their children to have a cell phone for safety. But all the parents admitted all their children had access to or owned a tablet or cell phone. That led to a discussion about parenting children in the digital age.

As parents, we have the responsibility to limit our children’s time with technology and to guide them as they use their phones, tablets, and computers. Limit the amount of time your children can spend on gaming and other online activities. Be consistent and firm.

It takes our time and attention to do this. In other words, look up from your own cell phone, tablet or computer to know what your kids are doing. As adults, are we modeling good use of cell phones, tablets and laptops?

How do we model good use of technology? Minimize your own digital distractions. Do not take your cell phone to the dinner table (whether you are at home or in a restaurant). Do not use your phone while driving or when helping your child with homework. Close your laptop and switch off the TV when you spend time with your child. It’s the best way to convey that digital media is never more important than human, face-to-face connection.

As we strive to role model appropriate technology use in the home, technology use in the workplace is also an issue. A recent national survey related to cell phone use in the work place asked if cell phones should be taken and/or used at meetings. Here are the results:

- **86%** think it’s inappropriate to answer phone calls during meetings
- **84%** think it’s inappropriate to write texts or emails during meetings
- **66%** think it’s inappropriate to write texts or emails even during lunches offsite

The researchers found that people think cell phone use in meetings is inappropriate because it can show:

- **Lack of respect.** You consider the information on your phone to be more important than the conversation at hand, and you view people outside of the meeting to be more important than those sitting right in front of you.
- **Lack of attention.** You are unable to stay focused on one thing at a time.
- **Lack of listening.** You aren’t practicing active listening, so no one around you feels heard.
• **Lack of power.** You are like a modern-day Pavlovian dog who responds to the whims of others through the buzz of your phone.

• **Lack of social awareness.** You don't understand how your behavior affects those around you.

The findings of the research can be translated to technology use in your home. Keep your face-to-face connection with your friends and family primary and technology secondary.

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