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Cell Phones Are Distracting Too Many Parents; Disrupting Communication With Kids

It's not just kids who are overdoing screen time. Parents are often just as guilty of spending too much time checking smartphones and e-mail — and the consequences for their children can be troubling. Dr. Jenny Radesky is a pediatrician specializing in child development. When she worked at a clinic in a high-tech savvy Seattle neighborhood, Radesky started noticing how often parents ignored their kids in favor of a mobile device. She remembers a mother placing her phone in the stroller between herself and the baby. "The baby was making faces and smiling at the mom," Radesky says, "and the mom wasn't picking up any of it; she was just watching a YouTube video." Radesky says that's a big mistake, because face-to-face interactions are the primary way children learn. "They learn language, they learn about their own emotions, they learn how to regulate them," she says. "They learn by watching us how to have a conversation, how to read other people's facial expressions. And if that's not happening, children are missing out on important development milestones." Psychologist Catherine Steiner-Adair says, because "when you're texting or answering email, the part

of your brain that is engaged is the 'to do' part, where there's also a sense of urgency to get the task accomplished, a sense of time pressure. So we're much more irritable when interrupted." And when parents focus on their digital world first — ahead of their children — there can be deep emotional consequences for the child, Steiner-Adair says. "We are behaving in ways that certainly tell children they don't matter, they're not interesting to us, they're not as compelling as anybody, anything, any ping that may interrupt our time with them," she says. In research for her book, Steiner-Adair interviewed 1,000 children between the ages of 4 and 18, asking them about their parents' use of mobile devices. The language that came up over and over and over again, she says, was "sad, mad, angry and lonely." One 4-year-old called his dad's smartphone a "stupid phone." Others recalled joyfully throwing their parent's phone into the toilet, putting it in the oven or hiding it. There was one girl who said, "I feel like I'm just boring. I'm boring my dad because he will take any text, any call, anytime — even on the ski lift!" A new study published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that adults absorbed in their mobile devices were more likely to harshly scold their children's behavior. One mother even kicked her child under the table after the child attempted to get her attention while she tapped away at her smartphone. Another mother ignored her child as he tried to lift her head from looking down at a tablet. "We know from decades of research that face-to-face interactions are important for cognitive, language and emotional development," Radesky told Health Day. "Before mobile devices existed, mealtime would've been a time where we would've seen those interactions." Ayatullah Ibrahim Amini in his book *The code of training* says: The parents therefore carry an onerous responsibility. They should be aware that the child has feelings and takes effect of their behavior. They must keep their attention focused on him. They should come to the presence of the child with a smiling and pleasant face. They should talk with the child affectionately. They should provide to the child educational toys so that it gets acquainted with the outside world with ease and comfort. If the felt needs and desires of the child are fulfilled, it will feel comfortable. It starts feeling that others wish him well and are his benefactors. When he receives good treatment, the child gets ready to be a good member of the society. Good and thoughtful parents don't beat the children nor do they treat them harshly. They are aware that such attitude will have adverse effect on the mind of the child and render him a defeatist and timid person. The Prophet of Islam has said: "Respect your children and give them a good upbringing that Allah blesses you." Makarim al-Akhlaq, Page 255. The Prophet used to play with his children and grand children every morning expressing his love and affection for them.[101] Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 104, Page 99.