Parents prefer phones to kids?

Those who specialize in child development say they're noticing more incidents of parents ignoring their kids in favor of their phones. For some kids, phones become hate objects.

by Chris Matyszczyk / April 21, 2014 9:37 AM PDT

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So cute. So adorable. The phone, that is.

Apple/YouTube screenshot by Chris Matyszczyk/CNET

When your child throws your cell phone down the toilet, you imagine that it's just a silly accident, don't you?

You've clearly not read enough children's books lately.

Children are dark, mischievous, occasionally downright nasty little things, demanding of more attention than a reality show contestant.

So should your phone meet a wet grave, consider this: Little Jocasta is sick and tired of you using that phone. And little Jocasta just isn't going to take it anymore.

As NPR reports, those who study children are concerned that parents in the more tech-obsessed parts of America (which would be almost everywhere) are ignoring their kids because phones are more interesting.
So kids are getting miffed.

In a book called "The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age," psychologist Catherine Steiner-Adair gave examples.

One child threw a parent's phone down the toilet. Another offered this painful quote: "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!"

I have no evidence that the dad in this case was CEO of a tech company.

Dr. Jenny Radesky, a pediatrician whose specialty is child development, says that in her observation some parents are more enchanted by screens than screams.

Indeed, she thought this such a grave state of affairs that she decided to study it. She and two fellow researchers sat in fast food restaurants and watched as parents and kids did their thing.

She says that out of the 55 parent-child groups they studied, 40 of the parents pulled out their phones and many seemed more engrossed in that than in their kids; 27 percent of parents used their phones for the whole time.

In one case, she described how a dad shouted at his kids to stop singing, because he was focused on his phone. The kids sang even louder.

Clearly, kids cannot decide if screens are their friends or not.

Some teachers worry that kids are being given iPads at a very young age, but have no clue what to do with building blocks.

Many parents give their kids iPhones or iPads to keep them quiet. There's nothing more mesmerizing than a silly game that's been specifically created to mesmerize
Parents prefer phones to kids? - CNET

The ultimate result, though, must surely be diminishing levels of interaction between parent and child. More and more people are disappearing into their own screen worlds and participating in their own virtual spheres.

Perhaps they find this more controllable, as well as enjoyable. And if it makes fast food restaurants less noisy, perhaps it'll be good for business.

Something, though, might be lost.

As individualistic philosophies are foisted upon societies that once believed in a more communal mentality, everyone becomes their own little island. That island often does most of its relating --business and personal -- through a screen.

If this continues, parents may be left as providers, rather than givers of joy and togetherness. Their relationship with their children might become increasingly virtual.

Kids, meanwhile, will become their own little operating systems.

Still, as we all become robotized by the superior vision of our masters in the Valley, perhaps it's best that kids are prepared for what is to come.

Tags: Technically Incorrect, Crave, Tech Culture, Tech Industry, Internet, Mobile

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MORE TECHNICALLY INCORRECT

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Online petition to deport Justin Bieber fails
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The Next Big Thing
Consoles go wide and far beyond gaming with power and realism.

CHECK IT OUT
This is why I plan on waiting until I get bored with gaming and tech before I have kids (which means I probably won't have kids). Too many 20 year olds are pumping out babies and then realizing a few months down the road that their next-gen console is more fun than a crying, puking, crapping baby. They would give or do anything to have some quiet time again which leads to horrible situations like this:


Don't put your child through hell. Make sure you REALLY are committed BEFORE it's too late.

Danngo

Samsung Galaxy S5: 4 Stars
LG G2: 4 Stars
iPhone 5: 4 1/2 Stars
Moto X: 3 1/2 Stars
Sarah: 3 Stars

SavioSeth

I think I will take the opposite take on this. I think that this idea of parents having to dote on their children and pay attention to them 24/7 is what has led to our current situation of children feeling so entitled and 40-somethings continuing to bum off their parents.

200 years ago the father went and tilled the field all day while the mother was busy keeping a house (which was MUCH more work than it is now) and the children ran off and did whatever they wanted together until they were put to work as well. And when those children grew up, they didn't believe that it was their parents' responsibility to take care of them.
I think we have too much entitlement today and too much of parents living their lives vicariously through their children. If there is a detriment to mobile phones and technology, then I don't think that it is due to parents lack of attention but rather to parents setting a bad example of being sedentary.

jmonty--2008 8 hours ago
Don't worry, your kids aren't being ignored. While you're using your cell the pedos are giving your kids 100% of their attention.

Ratnok 8 hours ago
Ugh. This is so true. I'm constantly telling my wife to put down the phone and pay attention to our daughter. I even went so far as to play that Stu clip where he says over and over again, "Mommy, mommy, mommy, mommy, ma mah, ma mah, ma mah, ma mah, mom, mom.mom, mom!!"

Because that's exactly how our daughter sounds all day long if I don't pick up the parenting slack.

Danngo 8 hours ago
Keep up the good work! You'll be your daughters favorite sure enough.

Seyha 9 hours ago
I agree kid should have phone but not smart phone. All they need phone that can call, text(optional).

NewiPhoneUser01 9 hours ago
It costs an arm and a leg to own and use a smartphone like the iPhone so I'd been selling my kids to feed my addiction to my smartphones.
ramsespriede 9 hours ago

While not all parents are guilty of this, I have definitely observed this phenomenon on a regular basis. This is not to say that parents must immediately address a whining/crying child. Sometimes kids need to learn to be patient. On the other hand, there are definitely times when parents ignore their offspring for extended periods of time. Just took a trip to the Bahamas and was privileged to witness a mom on her cell phone for close to three hours without once interacting with her child. Not a comprehensive sample to be sure, but depressing nonetheless.

Parents need to model acceptable behavior for their children. This does not mean cutting technology out of their lives, but using technology in appropriate ways. My parents gave me limits for how much TV and video games I could play each day. This helped me develop self discipline and time management. As a result, I didn't fail classes in college because I spent three straight days playing Halo 2 multiplayer like some of the guys in my dorm.

Technology is awesome, but it has a time and a place, like everything else. Moderation.

Murphy0407 10 hours ago

So.... we were giving our children too much of our time. Having the whole family life revolve around the children. Buying them too much, giving them too much freedom, giving in to them too much. Now this single study of 55 parents at a restaurant says we are too engrossed with our phones. Really..........?

arshield 9 hours ago

@Murphy0407  I agree. I am a stay at home dad (and previous watched my two nieces.) I could do that because of tech like my cell phone. I can go to the park and not fear things are falling apart because I can be reached.
Of course there are extreme cases where parents really are neglecting their kids. But kids have always been neglected. Overall I just don't think that the numbers show that children really are being neglected. Time spent with kids is way up over the 1950s or 1970s.

andrew7783  9 hours ago
@Murphy0407  I haven't heard anyone make the claim that parents are giving kids TOO MUCH attention in recent years. I'm a high school teacher, and believe me when I say that the biggest difference I observe between the kids who excel and the ones who fail and don't seem to care is a much greater degree of parental involvement with the former.

ramsespride  9 hours ago
@andrew7783  @Murphy0407  As a fellow high school teacher, I totally agree. I haven't seen any studies that show parents are spending more QUALITY time with their children. You can be in the same room, at the same event as your child, but not actually interacting with them... if you are engrossed in something else.

As a general rule, the students who excel in my school are the ones who's parents login to Powerschool, check their grades, come to dances and sporting events, participate in back to school night, come to IEP meetings... This doesn't mean these parents NEVER ignore their kids from time to time for a phone/tablet/tv, but I'd be willing to bet it happens far less frequently.

Ratnok  8 hours ago
@Murphy0407
The idea that kids are getting too much time from their parents is pure nonsense. Every sociological study since the '50's says exactly the opposite.

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**man_in_la2000**  
8 hours ago  
Raising kids is HARD, takes a village  
Don't make one, if you are not willing to put effort

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**Mergatroid Mania**  
10 hours ago  
My dad used to drink, read the newspaper and watch TV, in that order. Try getting attention in a family of 6 kids, even without cellphones.  
Somehow I don't find myself feeling sorry for these kids.

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**ramsespride**  
9 hours ago  
@Mergatroid Mania  
Sooo, you and these kids were both ignored by your parents. Yet you don't have empathy for them because they were ignored for a different reason... Strange.

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**Mergatroid Mania**  
3 hours ago  
@ramsespride  @Mergatroid Mania  
No, I just don't find that not getting a ton of attention is a big deal, and it's not going to ruin a kid for life. In fact, in a very large family, it's completely normal. Why should I sympathize with these kids for receiving an amount of attention I and many other kids consider normal?  
@jmonty--2008  
I would hardly call answering emails and texts "ignoring", and in a family of six kids I got about the same amount of attention as the rest of the kids, from both
parents. In fact, I would go so far as to say any kid that would throw a cell phone in the toilet because they feel slighted in some way is a spoiled brat. I'm not talking about kids that don't know any better.

I've seen kids having temper tantrums, and this seems similar to me. Kids, by their very nature, can be very unreasonable. And six kids can be six times as unreasonable. Sometimes I don't blame my dad for drinking. After being with some people's kids at times, I could use one myself.

jmonty--2008 8 hours ago
@Mergatroid Mania  My question is, did your mother ignore you too? I think the real concern here is that both parents fall under the spell of mobile devices, leaving the kids with no guidance at all.

SavioSeth 11 hours ago
So instead of ignoring our kids to watch TV, now we ignore them by looking at our phones. I don't see much difference.

nordlead2005 10 hours ago
@SavioSeth  The difference is it is easier to throw a cell phone in the toilet than a TV, especially for a child.

SavioSeth 10 hours ago
@nordlead2005  @SavioSeth
A kid throws my phone in the toilet, I'm gonna throw him in the toilet....

:)
Oops did I just give a "case in point"?

ramsespride 9 hours ago
@SavioSeth I think there's a significant difference. TV's aren't exactly mobile. They stayed in your living room. When families would go out to dinner, a baseball game, the park etc, families could interact and share without the interference of a TV. Mobile phones are portable and can disrupt normal family interaction anywhere, anytime.

nyc728 11 hours ago
As the husband of a child development administrator, I totally agree with these findings. Pretty sad.

jmonty--2008 8 hours ago
@nyc728 I agree as well but your qualification made me chuckle. It seems a bit tangental!

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