

What's The Issue?

Being able to process several things simultaneously in a media-rich world can be a real skill. When kids are constantly being interrupted by IMs, phone calls, and texts, multitasking can help them keep many balls in the air at once without dropping them. But it's also easy for kids to slip into habits with cell phones that put their safety, well-being, and reputation at risk.

Why It Matters

How do you know when multitasking may be a problem for you kids? Here are some warning signs to look for:

Distraction from schoolwork. Can your child remember what she read last night? Does her book report thesis make a consistent argument? If not, her divided attention may have hurt her ability to recall and retain information.

Social costs. Studies show that multitasking doesn't do much for intimate family relationships. We all know that kids' friends trump their parents. So if you were counting on a lovely family dinner, the moment a text comes in from a friend, the connection with the family takes a back seat.

Not paying attention. Kids who walk with their heads down as they text, talk, or play games will have a harder time paying attention to their surroundings. This dangerous habit may linger as kids get older and begin to bike and drive.

Common Sense Says

Start good habits early.

Establish boundaries. Start when your kids are young. Turn the phone off during homework. IM, too.

Establish consequences for misuse.

Obvious distraction, cheating, and inappropriate messages are no-go's. Want to make your point? Take your kid's phone away for a week.

Model what you preach.

This means no checking your Blackberry while asking your kids how their day was.

Encourage active listening.

In our 24/7 media culture, knowing how to turn off devices and tune in to a conversation can be difficult. Help kids understand what it means to give a friend, family member, or teacher your undivided attention.