

For The Children's Sake, Put Down That Smartphone

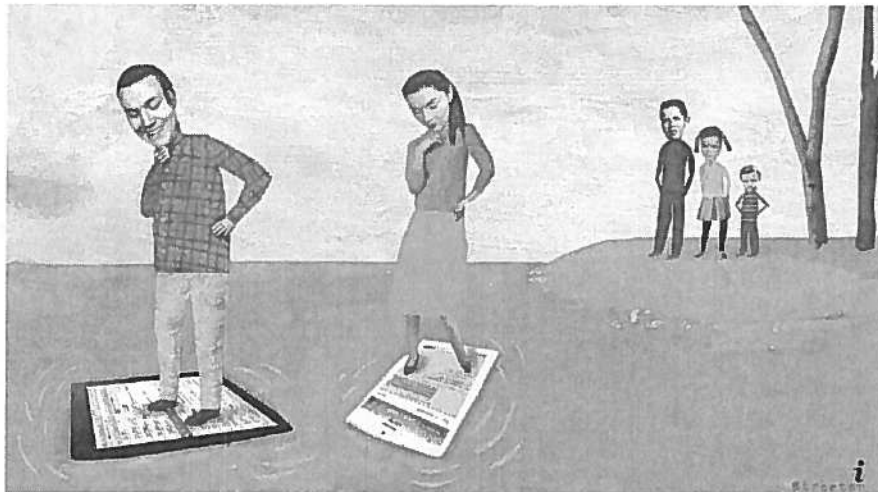
by PATTI NEIGHMOND

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Morning Edition

4 min 8 sec



Katharine Streeker for NPR

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."



All Tech Considered
When Parents Are
The Ones Too
Distracted By Devices

Radesky was so concerned she decided to study the behavior. After relocating to Boston Medical Center, she and two other researchers

spent one summer observing 55 different groups of parents and young children eating at fast food restaurants. Many of the caregivers pulled out a mobile device right away, she says. "They looked at it, scrolled on it and typed for most of the meal, only putting it down intermittently."

This was not a scientific study, Radesky is quick to point out. It was more like anthropological observation, complete with detailed field notes. Forty of the 55 parents used a mobile device during the meal, and many, she says, were more absorbed in the device than in the kids.

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."

And, perhaps not surprisingly, when Radesky looked at the patterns in what she and the other researchers observed, she found that kids with parents who were most absorbed in their devices were more likely to act out, in an effort to get their parents' attention. She recalls one group of three boys and their father: The father was on his cellphone, and the boys were singing a song repetitively and acting silly. When the boys got too loud, the father looked up from his phone and shouted at them to stop. But that only made the boys sing louder and act sillier.

Psychologist Catherine Steiner-Adair wrote a book about parenting, called *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age*. She sees lots of parents, teens and younger kids in her clinical practice in Massachusetts. The father's reaction to his three silly boys might be expected, she 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."



Shots - Health News
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Help Or Harm?**

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!"

Steiner-Adair says we don't know exactly how much these mini moments of disconnect between a parent and child affect the child in the long term. But based on the stories she hears, she suggests that parents think twice before picking up a mobile device when they're with their kids.

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Home Reading Strategies



Beyond the Reading Log

[Bruce Frost](#)

Teaching and sharing of reading is not the sole territory of teachers and librarians. In fact, home reading is integral to the process of becoming a stronger, lifelong reader.

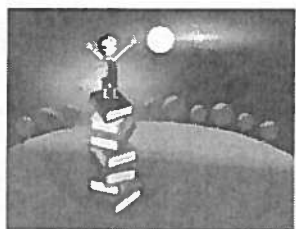
Home Reading Log			
Name	Address	Phone	Date
City	State	Zip	Page
Title	Author	Pages	Date
Summary			
Character			
Setting			
Plot			
Theme			
Parent's Signature			

When parents hear the term “home reading”, many picture the daily reading logs sent home each week. The only requirements to most of these logs are title, author, pages, and date. And the sole purpose of such logs is to prove to teachers that students are meeting district requirements at home, as well as conditioning students to read consistently.

However, home reading should be a more exciting and enriching experience than this. Let’s face it! The traditional reading log is unrestricted and unguided, open to apathy and fudging. For the most part, children choose their own materials, read to themselves, and record their own logs.



Free choice is important. But remember, children in elementary grade levels are still learning how to choose books and magazines that are suitable for them. In addition, many parents may mistakenly believe that these home reading assignments are meant to be independent, especially in the upper elementary level. That children should be reading for consistency only. However, though this type of freedom and independence should be welcome, it is actually confusing and frustrating for the child reader and subsequently for the parent or guardian. Not to mention, this type of freedom and year-long assignment often gives children and parents the sense that reading is not a top priority in the realm of homework.



Home reading should be the flip of this. It should enable the child to use the strategies learned in school comfortably. It should excite the young reader, drive the reader to seek new books, and open up more avenues to the imagination and the real world.

So how can we give home reading a new image?

One way is to envision home reading as a partnership or a group activity, instead of an individual assignment – or to see it as an extension of the classroom experience.

First, parents can become a facilitator, whose goals range from helping a child select appropriate and interesting reading materials to asking the child questions about what was read to guiding the child through different reading skills and thought processes.

But to empower the child's own decisions and thought processes, it is important to create a more



interactive environment – between peers or between the child and a family member. This type of interaction is a combination of facilitator and partnership, where again intelligent book choices are made, formal discussion arranged, and guidance in basic skills is given.

And yet discussion is the most powerful aspect of this experience. Discussion strengthens the child's ability to consciously reflect on what he or she is reading, to use their reflections to build meaning and enjoyment of what they are reading. When a parent shares in this discussion with a child, the child learns from the parent's own reflections as well as learns how to appreciate the different perspectives people bring to reading. And though children in the younger grades benefit from the necessity of parent involvement, that involvement may be more on a facilitator level. These children, as well as the older readers, are quite capable of sharing in a discussion. All children are capable of deeper exploration of these worlds and only seek and need companionship on their quest.

Below are some helpful strategies in encouraging a child to be a reflective home reader and helping light their way. Keep in mind that these should be used with illustrations as well as text.

Five Ways to Encourage the Reflective Reader

- **Predictions:** What do you predict will happen next in the story? by the end of the book? Why do you predict these things?
- **Connections:**
 - **Text-Text:** How does this story or parts of this story connect to other stories or books you have read?
 - **Text-Self:** How does it connect to your own experiences?
 - **Text-World:** How does it connect to things outside of you? Your family? Friends? School? World?
 - **Text-Media:** How does it connect to movies, television shows, or other types of media you have seen or experienced?
 - **Feelings:** How does this story or parts of this story make you feel? How do different characters make you feel? What would you do in their shoes?
 - **Questions:** What questions do you have about the story? What do you wonder about? What confuses you? Can you answer your own question based on clues you have already read?
 - **Comments:** What are some things you notice about this story or parts of the story? What do you think about how the author writes the story?

As the home reading discussion grows, it is important that reflections for both child and parents evolve to explaining the ideas expressed. And eventually these ideas may be extended to new ideas or



understandings, helping the child delve into new aspects of the world.

In the end, guided discussion is just the beginning of what you can do to encourage home reading. Book clubs, journals, writing online book reviews, attending author events, visiting museum exhibits that connect to a book, reinventing the book as a play are other wonderful possibilities.

Don't let the reading log be the end of the journey.

For tips on helping a child select appropriate reading materials, speak to the child's teacher, school and local librarians, as well as other parents. Below are some articles that may also help.

"Help a Child Choose a Book" at readwritethink.org website.

"Tips for Choosing Books for Kids" at the nea.org website.

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- **Congratulations to our own, Nancy Bo Flood, for her inclusion on the NCTE Notable Poetry Selection (2014) list for her stunning collection of poems, Cowboy UP! (photo-illustrated by Jan Sonnenmair, WordSong, 2013).**

- **Mission Statement**

To provide teachers, librarians, and parents with the resources and inspiration to foster a love of