

6 Eye-Opening Stats About Parenting and Smartphones

Let's be real: It's no easy task to be a focused, patient, intentional parent in our fast-paced, task-driven, digitally saturated culture.

We Feel the Pressure

We feel pressured to be available in remote places during the most sacred times. We often have multiple requests coming at us with flashing lights and intrusive dings.

We live in a world that wants to know how much we accomplished—a world where daily achievements are publicly broadcast—a world that values instantaneous electronic responses over face-to-face connection.

It's challenging to live a distraction-free life as a parent when the world is constantly tapping us on the shoulder with another message to answer or task to complete. But how much I achieved and how fast I responded isn't what I want my family to remember about me when I'm gone.

Earlier this year, I stumbled upon a few eye-opening statistics.

6 Eye-Opening Stats

- 65 percent of parents, ages 25-34, believe they check their phone too much (56 percent of kids agree).
- 31 percent of parents say they don't set a good example with mobile device usage (22 percent of kids agree).
- 45 percent of parents get distracted while having a conversation with their kids (39 percent of kids agree).
- 47 percent of kids say they would confiscate a parent's mobile device if they could.

- 53 percent of parents believe they check their phone too much (65 percent within the 25-34 age group).
- 47 percent of parents believe their children spend more time on their mobile device than with them.

Source: AVG Technologies Digital Diaries Research, June 2015.

Is This You?

Do these statistics describe you? If so, don't fret. That was me too.

What may be more shocking is the percentage of kids who agree with the statement. For me, it's more than just being distracted. It affects my children too. I think of it like this:

- If I want my kids to be awed by sunsets in the future, I must take time to be awed by sights in nature now.
- If I want my children to appreciate the joy of a screen-free Saturday afternoon in the future, I must take time to show them the joys of a screen-free Saturday now.
- If I want my children to value experiences rather than things, I must celebrate a run through the sprinkler, good conversation and crickets that lull us to sleep.
- If I want my children to experience the freedom that comes from open blue skies, green grass between my toes and crunchy leaves underfoot, I must partake in such freedoms myself.
- If I want my children to look into the eyes of those who speak to them, I must look into their eyes and listen to their words.

A Hands-Free Vow for Today

By modeling how to live life with open hands and attentive eyes, there is a very good chance my children will remember me as an active participant in their lives. So I started with a simple vow each day.

"Today, I want you to remember my listening face—not my fake listening face, the one that nods robotically and looks right through you. Today, I want to love you by listening, really listening. Today, I want you to remember my open hands—not my multi-tasking hands, the ones too full, too busy, too pushy to gently tuck your hair behind your ear. Today, I want to love you by opening my two free hands. Today, I want you to remember my loving voice—not my impatient, exasperated, not-right-now voice. Today, I want to love you by speaking kindly. Today, I want you to remember my present self—not my moving-target self, the one darting frantically from point A to point B, too hurried to let you set the pace. Today, I want to love you by slowing down."

Put on a Listening Face

Out of all the behaviors listed in the vow, the most important one to me is the listening face.

My dad gave me the gift of the listening face throughout my childhood and tumultuous teen years. Looking back now, I'm quite certain it saved my life. The fact that my dad valued what I had to say—no matter how unimportant or trivial—gave me the confidence to speak up even in the most intimidating and dangerous situations. It gave me the ability to speak up for my beliefs, for my dreams and for those who couldn't speak up for themselves. My dad's listening face gave me a voice.

When my children were born, I aspired to give them the same soul-building gift. I found great hope in the fact that even at the height of my overwhelmed life, I still managed to offer the listening face to my children. It was the one thing I knew I could do well, even if I was failing at everything else.

Today, I continue to make every effort to hear my children's words. I know firsthand how important this offering is to the emotional well-being of a child, no matter the age.

Maybe, Just Maybe ...

Someday, I hope my children will remember the way I made eye contact, the nodding of my head and my thoughtful responses.

Maybe, just maybe, the results of these daily gestures of love and presence will be evident sooner than expected. Maybe, just maybe, I won't have to wait until my dying breath to see these loving actions have made a difference.

Maybe, just maybe, these daily gestures will make up how I'm someday remembered, but more importantly, who I am. Maybe, just maybe, these offerings will live in the heart, soul and facial expressions of those I love dearly.

And maybe, just maybe, their lives will be better for it.

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