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## **What Mobile Phones are Doing to Our Kids**

### **mobile phones can be a health, safety and educational risk for our children**

Almost everyone has them. Without mobile phones life would be so much more inconvenient, especially for adults. It has also become common practice for parents and carers to provide them to children, initially as a communication device. Away from home the kids can be contacted wherever they are; and should they need to touch base for whatever reason, Mum or Dad are just seconds away with a simple tap. From a safety point of view they are reassuring, a means of enlisting help instantly at a given moment when the last bus has gone and they need picking up rather than having to walk home alone in the dark. Of course, there are times, usually many of them, that this taxi service is abused; but in the main, adults generally wear the annoyance as part of their role as caring parents.

So, where's the harm in kids having a mobile? In the past it was claimed that there was a radiation danger; but the introduction of touch screens meant that for the duration of a call the phone could be at arm's length rather than held close to the brain. This article, however, is not about the direct physical risk. The problem is psychological and long-term.

Needless to say, chatting to the olds is rarely high on a child's priority list; but friends also have phones. Unfortunately, enemies and vindictive trolls have them too. Cyber bullying on social media is often blamed for inflicting stress and sometimes fear in the recipients of hate messages; and I don't believe mobile phone users are immune. Too many youngsters subjected to this kind of cowardly sniping develop low self esteem and personality issues occasionally leading to suicidal tendencies. Even if these are overcome, the mental scarring remains and is likely to affect how they approach life and relationships in the future.

Luckily, most kids aren't worried on this score and lead pretty normal, relatively stress-free lives; at least they imagine they do. From the perspective of adults - considerate thinking adults, that is - in many instances they see kids being disadvantaged by mobile phones. Their charges seem to spend a good portion of their time on them; chatting and texting, playing games, accessing spurious apps away from parents who would have a fit if they knew how dangerous some can be (see Healthy Living HL42).

Assuming the less-adventurous merely use their phones for communication, it being the original intention when they were first invented, where's the problem? There wouldn't be one except for the amount of time spent on these disruptive and distracting devices. We

witness many people, adults included, walking the streets, crossing roads, on public transport, driving even; smart phones in hand or against the ear, talking and tapping; totally oblivious to the world around them.

Kids take it a step further. They are on them at school; and not just during breaks, I fancy. How would a teacher with a class of thirty know whether some individuals were paying more attention to texting under the desk and out of sight, rather than focusing on the lesson? A minute might lose the student a detail or two of a concept; five minutes an extended progression; the entire period an important chunk that could see the difference between passing or failing a subsequent test. Spread this activity over a semester, perhaps the school year, and we have a poorly educated loser-in-the-making.

Okay, out of the classroom and into the school yard for a morning break or lunch time. Some are running and leaping, playing sports of different kinds; exercising their bodies and burning off a few mental tensions that have built up during the day. The “mobile” brigade, however, are on their phones again; absorbed in a cocoon of irrelevance and lethargy. One day they may decide to look around to discover that real people no longer exist; only voices through speakers and abbreviated words on a flat screen.

Exaggeration and just my own opinion, you might say, which doesn't really count for much. Apparently a few schools do agree, because they have banned mobile phones. No, it's not bloody-minded and irresponsible: if kids need to contact someone outside on an acceptably important matter there are ordinary telephones available for use; and should parents have to talk to their kids they can phone the office. Shock, horror! How decadent and cruel is that? Well, no more so than it was in the days before mobile phones. We, the olds, had to cope – what we had was all we had – and, surprisingly we survived: reasonably well-educated; and very concerned that this modern trend is doing irreparable damage to those we should be protecting.

In closing, I say: let's talk to our kids about loving them; keeping them safe and healthy in body and mind; but let's do it face to face - not on the mobile phone!

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