

## Accountability with Digital Devices - Cell Phones Harmful During Family Time

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### Accountability with Digital Devices

Are cell phones dangerous to use while driving? Of course, absolutely. Cell phones can also be harmful when used during family time! When you text and drive, the harm can be imminent. The risk of texting during family gatherings is cumulative, as it can gradually erode relationships.

Our lives are busy juggling work, school, family, extra-curricular activities, and more. For many families, dinner time is the only time of the day that everyone is together. These moments are precious and should be cherished. Yet, instead of connecting with those at our dinner table, we often choose to connect with people and events around the world.

If I use a phone at the dinner table, I send the message to my family, "You are so not important. I have more important people to connect with right now. I am not interested in your life. I have nothing to talk to you about." More importantly, our children learn from the examples we set. When we model conversation

skills, our table manners can become theirs.

Technology can be a great tool to create connections. However, used at the wrong time and for the wrong purpose, it does the exact opposite—it disconnects us. Used at the dinner table, technology disrupts the flow of family time and becomes a distraction and source of conflict, causing ripples within the loving context of the family. Balancing technology use with our everyday lives is an ongoing struggle for many families, mine included.

If we don't put a conscious effort into disconnecting from our phones during family times, the impact can be enormous. We can become strangers to each other. Having some guidelines or rules about cell phones are important. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Make dinner a cell phone-free zone. If needed, have a basket where all cell phones go during dinner.
- Model what to do by saying, "I am putting my cell phone on silent, so I can give you a hundred percent of my attention."
- Have a family charging station for all cell phones and devices, to help manage their use at mealtimes, bedtimes, etc.
- Tie privileges such as getting a cell phone to other areas of being responsible or accountable in your child's life. For example, have a conversation with your son or daughter about the privilege of getting a cell phone.
- Say something like, "Having and using a cell phone is a responsibility. Your father and I have been thinking about when we can trust that you are ready for this. How do you think that you are doing at being responsible with your chores (or school work or getting up on your own every morning, managing your weekly schedule, etc.)? We would really like to see you become more consistent in this/these areas. How about we make an agreement that you show us that you are ready for the privilege of having a phone by being consistent with your chores for the next two months?"
- I highly recommend making a contract with your son or daughter once they are ready to have a phone. I really like this following resource: *Teen Cell Phone Contract—Healthy Boundaries for Teen Cell Phone Use*, Josh Shipp, free download at [joshshipp.com/teen-cell-phone-contract/](http://joshshipp.com/teen-cell-phone-contract/)

- Self-control is like a muscle that can be strengthened and improved. Technology is a great tool to strengthen self-control.

For information about my book, "**7 Gifts to Give Your Child--Parenting That Will Touch Their Future**" please visit: [www.coachmyrna.org/7-gifts-to-give-your-child.html](http://www.coachmyrna.org/7-gifts-to-give-your-child.html)

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