

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Michael Grose

Lost in concentration



It's more challenging than ever to be present with our kids, and so easy to get lost in concentration on a device. Here are 5 tips to really impact and make the most of every opportunity you have with your kids

I can't help but admire my young colleague Sonia, mother of a 4-year-old boy and a seven-year-old girl. She is an avid user of social media and other electronic devices, but she is disciplined enough to set them aside when she is with her kids. Sonia chooses to focus her attention on her children, so she limits her use of communication devices to the times when she is alone – which she admits is less often than she'd like.

Electronic devices such as tablets and mobile phones are ever present. They are heaps of fun, the source of so much knowledge and a great way to stay in touch with others. The flip side is that their hypnotic effect is powerful so that frequently all our concentration is directed at them rather than our kids. When this happens you'll more than likely miss some wonderful opportunities to really impact your child

There are five BIG opportunities available to you as a parent if you, like Sonia, choose to be in the moment when you have children.

When you are fully present you can:

1 Build their language

Recently, I saw a mother walking side by side with a young toddler playing a simple language game. She would make a sound with her mouth and her young son would mimic her. She changed or added to the sounds and her son tried to replicate the sounds. This is language building at its most natural and finest, and wouldn't have happened if this mother was on the mobile phone rather than being present with her child. Whether you are with a toddler, primary aged child or a teen the language building opportunities are endless. You just have to focus on the one you are with and let things happen naturally.

2 Teach your children about their world

Most children are naturally curious and will ask lots of questions. "Why do dogs bark?" "Why is the sun round?" "Where do babies come from?" Yes, some are simple, some are hard to answer and some you are just

not ready for. But it's through these simple interactions that you become your child's first and most important teacher. My hunch is that most kids will stop asking these questions of you if your attention is focused elsewhere, such as on a mobile phone or other electronic device.

3 Impact their thinking

Influential British educator Charles Des Forges says, "If you want to influence your child's thinking then you need to talk to him. If parents want more influence then they need to talk more to their children." According to Des Forges it's through the conversations that parents have with their children that they impact the way they think, as well as influence their values. Nothing kills personal conversation with a child or young person like a mobile device.

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... Lost in concentration ...

4 Build relationships

Relationships are built through common interest, good intent and respectful behaviour. I can think of no better reason for being in the moment with your child than the opportunity it presents to build some common interest and rapport. Time spent giving attention to your child is like putting money in the bank for the future. You never know when you are going to withdraw some of the deposits that you've made, so it's reassuring to know that you've made plenty of deposits of goodwill to draw on, particularly in the tricky teenage years.

5 Build memories for you

As a parent of adult children I now treasure the memories of times I was fortunate to have spent with them as young children. It's strange how these memories resurface at the most unexpected time. Recently, I was in a supermarket and I remembered the time when I enthusiastically asked my youngest, who was three at the time, to get the box of cereal with the big red K. Off she went feeling all important and returned with a triumphant smile armed with a box of dog food. "Thanks darling. Nearly!" was my reply desperate not to quell the enthusiasm to help that only a three year old can have.

Yes, there are million memories such as this available to parents who are willing to focus attention on the children rather than be distracted by the lure of communication devices.

As a parent you have competing demands on your time, and the allure of communication technology can be overwhelming. However, as Sonia is so aware, the time for parents to really impact on kids is limited so you want to make the most of every opportunity you have with them.

The key to positively influencing your kids, building strong relationships and building enough fond memories to last a lifetime is to make sure that your mind is where your body is and be fully present when you are with your kids.

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