

Why Banning Kids from Phones Doesn't Work? Here's a More Effective Way

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Recently, a series of high school students have gone missing or mysteriously run away from home, causing parents to worry. The most typical case is the case of a 13-year-old girl who ran away from home on her own following the instructions of her online friends. She was recently found, serving as a wake-up call for parents to monitor their children's use of electronic devices.

Why is control counterproductive?

When parents ban technology, kids don't just comply. They get creative. They've learned to create secret social media accounts, hide app icons behind computer logos, and access devices at friends' homes.

The real danger isn't that they'll just cut back on screen time a little bit. The danger is that they'll lose the ability to go to their parents when they have problems online.

When parents focus primarily on controlling their children's behavior, they risk damaging the very relationships that could help them use technology in healthy ways.

In their book *Hold on to Your Kids*, Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté tell the story of 13-year-old Melanie, whose behavior changed dramatically after the death of her grandmother. Instead of supporting her through her grief, her parents responded to her withdrawal with more rules and punishments, creating a vicious cycle in which her friends grew closer to her than her family.

If the book had been written today, Melanie's father would have scolded her for always using her phone and taken it away. But would this have improved their relationship?

The 'solution' of imposing stricter rules doesn't address why Melanie alienated her friends in the first place.



What are children really getting away from?

Here's the thing: When kids spend too much time on screens, they're often pulling away from something, and sometimes that something is their parents. Many teens become "extroverted"—more attached to their friends than their parents, as Neufeld and Maté call it.

Cutting back on screen time won't bring them back to you if you haven't addressed why they're doing it in the first place. If your relationship is all about rules and compliance, taking away their phone won't suddenly create a connection.

Better strategies than banning kids from using phones

Instead of focusing solely on restriction, consider these approaches:

1. **Look at the big picture, not just the screen:** If your child seems addicted to their phone, ask: *Is they avoiding homework? Are they using social media to connect when they feel isolated? Are they surfing the web to decompress after a stressful day?* The phone may be a coping mechanism, not the real problem.
2. **Build strong relationships through listening:** The best protection is a close, caring relationship with your parents. Make time for real conversations. Instead of asking, "How was school today?" try asking, "What was the best part of your day?" When your child shares something on their phone, avoid saying, "You're always on that." Try asking, "That was interesting, tell me more."
3. **Collaborate instead of just setting rules:** Let your child decide on healthy limits together. Sit down and say, "I've read about screen time, and I'm curious about your perspective. How do you feel after spending

time on different apps? What would healthy screen time look like for our family? ' Then really listen and work together to come to an agreement.

4. **Focus on bigger sources of stress:** Pay attention to pressure about grades, activities, or performance. Sometimes, the kids who seem to have it all figured out are carrying the biggest burden. Ask them what support they need.
5. **Create opportunities for phone-free connection without feeling like you're imposing rules:** Instead of saying " *no phones at dinner* ," try " *I miss you. Do you want to cook with me tonight?* " Find out what your child's interests are and ask genuine questions about what they're watching or playing.



Remember, every child is different: What works for one child may not work for another. For some kids, social media is a source of stress. For others, it's a place where they find important support. Think about your child's personality when deciding about screen time with them .

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