



SMART Phones in Schools: What Shall We Do About It?

By Marilyn J. Dominick, Chairperson of the NEW Council

Quite recently, I found a noteworthy editorial published in our local newspaper, *The Syracuse Post Standard*. Written by Ryan Burdick, a public middle school teacher, the piece highlights a crisis Ryan's students are facing. He has observed that his students are excessively engaged on their devices, and they seem to have lost interest to communicate with those around them. The article is a call to adults, urging them to give more attention to this generation of students.

Ryan Burdick writes that "Smartphones... have disrupted the healthy balance of social - versus family - life to the point that kids can't escape their peers or the accompanying social drama, and in doing so, we have effectively removed the adult from the room - every room."

How have students changed?

Burdick has been teaching eighth graders for 13 years. He observes that they have always been weird, but they are his people! "Silly, impulsive, awkward, self-obsessed, quick to humor." The author admits to loving them, but he is really worried about them.

Burdick says, "Their willingness (their ability?) to participate in class discussion, ask for help, inquire about content and assignments, request work they missed, laugh at humor, respond to personal anecdotes...it's dying."

What do students and parents need to do?

Students desperately need adult interaction. They are not learning the art of social adaptation. They are not learning the norms and expectations of various settings by observing adults around them. There is a lack of coaching and modeling from adults about what it is like to be an active social participant. Instead, students take the easy way out, and their adults allow them to do it. It amounts to enabled isolation skill deficits that may lead our kids to anxiety and depression.

Kids really need to watch and listen to mature and responsible adults instead of being enamored by social media influences. Our children need to hear us resolve conflict, make calculated decisions, overcome self-doubt, talk about our work, express love and support to others, and learn to care about others. They need good adult role models to teach them how to responsibly manage time, money, and home chores, also learning to repair things and pursue healthy hobbies.

While their concerned parents come to the open house at school with a good sense of humor, Burdick admits that he is seeing those traits reflected in fewer and fewer of their children.

His is a call to all adults to engage with our middle school students to model “adulting” to them. He is sounding an alarm that, if not heeded, may lead to a generation of young people who are unable to process life and who may walk a purposeless path into adulthood.

As I go into and out of the schools in my community, I am concerned as well. We need to pray for our schools—the administrators, teachers, and students.

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