I spotted a very interesting article in a New Zealand paper recently, entitled Parents suffering iGuilt over smartphones. www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10808609. Given that work/life balance is one element of my specialty topic of time management, my attention was caught immediately.

Maybe we need to start an i-Aholics Society! The problem is, technology is fun, easy, alluring and yes – addictive. The technology is great; it’s wonderful to be able to instantly connect with people anywhere – but do we need to do it all the time? What are the consequences to our relationships as well as our business ones.

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What makes a friendship?

Two friends, who had lived in the same city for some years, now live in different countries. They were both attending a conference in the States so decided rooming together would be a great way to reconnect and spend time together.

A few months later one of them told me rather sadly: “I was so looking forward to spending time with Vanessa. But every time we were in our room and finally had time for girl-talk without others around, she spent all her time on her phone, Facebook and other social media. I came home feeling ignored, sad and really let down. I feel as though I’m not important to her anymore.”

Teaching in a digital world

I’m delighted that my two oldest grandsons attend a state secondary school that has much higher standards of behavior than most New Zealand public schools – Palmerston North Boys http://www.pnbhs.school.nz/. Relevant to our technology theme, no lads are allowed to use mobile phones, iPods or any other similar digital device at school. An offender has his device confiscated for about two weeks and has to negotiate with a senior master to get it returned. There are many benefits, not least being that the boys are not distracted from the business of developing into “educated men of outstanding character”.

Parenting in a digital world

If you’re a parent, when was the last time you switched off your phone and just ‘hung out’ with a child?

I’m not suggesting that we have to be 100 per cent available for our children all the time we’re in their company. God forbid! That sounds like a very stressful recipe for them as well as their parents. But when we carve out appropriate chunks of time to give them our full attention, we create very special memories for both. Even 30 minutes a week makes a difference.

When my six kids were all under 12 their father and I realised that, in the busyness, it was rare to give any one child “special time” without their siblings interrupting or allowing ourselves to be distracted. So we set up a “Special Time” system. Each child had a half-hour per week with one parent – and the child chose the parent and the activity. We kept track on a fridge chart, with the commitment (appointment) recorded at the beginning of each week. My – then six-year-old only daughter still remembers playing ‘dolls’ tea parties with her six-foot tall farming father. She’s now 38 and a mother of three.

What can we learn from the French?

I’ve just come back from a month’s holiday in France, most of it spent with French families. There’s a lot we can learn from the way the French do their parenting. A significant feature of family life is the importance placed on sharing meals. Everyone, even children as young as two, eat together, usually about 8.00 pm. It’s time to share the highlights of the day, discuss events, just ‘be’. I never saw a mobile phone in evidence at any of these tables. It would have been regarded as the height of disrespect and rudeness. The focus instead was on savouring the food, enjoying the conversation, relaxing. Meals are a time to be fully present.

If you think you might be falling into the i-Guilt trap, try turning your digital devices off regularly. You might be surprised at the different quality of your time with others.

(As an aside, if you’re interested to know why French children are so much better behaved than many English-speaking children, eat a wide range of foods, sleep better, don’t run their parents ragged and are polite to their elders, check out Bringing up Bébé – one American mother discovers the wisdom of French parenting by Pamela Druckerman. Great book, jam-packed with commonsense advice.)

If you’d like a regular reminder of good time habits, grab your personal copy of How to Master Time in Only 90 Seconds at www.gettingagrip.com followed by a regular supply of short and practical Top Time Tips.

Robyn Pearce is a Certified Speaking Professional. Check the resources on her website www.gettingagrip.com

Robyn Pearce

Mobiles off please! What are they doing to our relationships?

Robyn Pearce

[Image of a smiley face and a sad face]