

Distraction, Multitasking, and Time Management

Technology isn't going anywhere. But multitasking — specifically media multitasking — is a concern. Some parents feel like kids may benefit from learning how to work around disruptions, since they're going to need this skill for their entire lives. On the other hand, research shows that media multitasking can have a negative impact on school performance.

- **Try an experiment.**

It's important to develop a strategy to help your kids focus and tune out distractions. If the strategy is successful, it can become a good habit. When you figure out what strategy you want to try (see the tip below for some ideas), propose an experiment. Say: "I've noticed that you get distracted by your phone during homework. I get distracted by my phone when I'm trying to work, too. Let's try an experiment." Then, explain the strategy you would like them to try. You may want to set a specific amount of time for the experiment as well (e.g., "We'll try this for three days" or "We'll try this on Tuesdays and Thursdays"). It can also be helpful to offer to try the experiment together — and doing a joint-experiment gives you an easy entry point for conversations during and after to explore what worked and what didn't.

- **Get some distance from the distraction.**

Many kids describe how a constantly buzzing cell phone distracts them from their work. But they have difficulty turning it off, for fear of missing out. After discussing it with your child, consider these solutions:

- **Get some physical distance from your phone.** Leave it in another room or put it in a drawer or box that isn't within arm's length.
- **Turn it on silent.** And keep the phone facedown on the table.
- **Take breaks for tech.** After a certain amount of homework time, or after an assignment is completed, take 15 minutes to check and respond to messages.

- **Try self-regulation apps to eliminate distractions.**

Learning to self-regulate is an essential skill. But kids often need support — and in fact, they often welcome tech solutions that help them manage their time. There are a number of apps designed to help people focus. Some apps let you block certain websites for a set amount of time. With others, you can whitelist and blacklist sites. For example, you can still use Wikipedia to read about mitosis, but you won't be able to get on Facebook. Some teens like such self-regulation apps because they are taking responsibility for setting rules for themselves. They allow teens to stay in the driver's seat, recognizing and managing the benefits and pitfalls of a 24/7 digital life.