

## **JACK'S CORNER**

**QUESTION:** My 12-year-old is always on her phone texting or talking. It's like she's always in her own little world. She ignores our family and doesn't contribute to our conversations. I'm sorry I got her the phone! What should I do?

**ANSWER:** Behaviors always serve a purpose; they have an attractive function in the eyes of the person. **For the adolescent**, the cell phone is the door to a private world filled with intrigue, drama, instant response and access, status, power etc. in the mist of an often boring, adult-dominated, rule-filled world. The cell phone is titillating addictive and requires little from the user (except mom and dad's money). It represents safe, and at times, anonymous relationship and intimacy. No wonder adolescents are hooked, and then preoccupied!

Adolescents long for relationship, identity, meaning, power, investment, status, attention and security. In its own way, the cell phone provides much of these. The catch is that it provides a measure of these longings at the expense of face-to-face relationships. Much like many Internet relationships, the cell phone does not require the degree of courage, engagement or empathy that real-life, real-presence relationships do.

(Needless to say, the convenience and safety cell phones can provide for adolescents who are away from home, provide a wonderful peace of mind for parents. Used responsibly, sparingly and thoughtfully, they are a technological gift of great value.)

Your daughter, with your help, needs to learn to use her phone "responsibly, sparingly and thoughtfully." Sit down with her and let her know your rules. Talk about cell phone etiquette. (Quite a few adults could use this talk too.) Limit

the time and setting where she can use her phone. Be clear and exact; anticipate your daughter's objections. Most 12-year-olds I know don't need to be connected at the hip to a cell phone. I know it's cool and it's status, but it is not required.

Of course your daughter will push back when you enforce your rules. Maintain a mood of calmness. Tell her you want the best for her in terms of relationship and responsibility. Let her see your godly love and concern for her in your eyes and hear it in your voice. Tell her you have made a judgment mistake, and you need to correct it. Admitting you were wrong should open up some doors to great conversations. Seize this opportunity! Changing this entrenched behavior won't be easy. You must out last her.

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