

Put down your phone

by BRIAN LOCKHART

I read a posting on one of the forums I am involved in by a teacher who tried somewhat of an experiment in her classroom.

At the end of the school, several minutes before the bell rang, she separated the class into several small groups and told them to talk among themselves about whichever topic they thought would be interesting.

These kids were in the seven- and eight-year-old, range. Her experiment was designed to just give the kids five minutes to themselves at the end of the day when they could spend a few minutes speaking to other kids about something they might think is important.

The teacher noticed that in a couple of the groups, the kids weren't talking to each other and seemed distracted. She realized that most of them seemed to be looking for a device like a phone or tablet.

The teacher was astonished to see that quite a few of the kids in her class did not want to, or could not, seem to form a conversation and instead were more focused when they had a device of some sort in front of their eyes.

Cell phones are great devices. You can contact someone from anywhere or pull up information at the drop of a hat. You can map your destination and receive directions when on the road, and you can order a coffee at Tim Hortons which will be ready for you when you get there.

At the same time these phones are becoming a menace to society.

There was a great photograph going around online of a subway car in Japan posted by a guy who lived there, with a funny caption attached.

Every single person on that subway car was looking at a phone - every one.

If you get caught driving while using your phone, you're going to pay a hefty fine ? and with good reason. If you are using your phone you are distracted from the task of driving, which can have fatal consequences.

Phones have become the great distraction in society. If you are on the phone, you are distracted from everything else around you, and that includes people.

A while ago I was seated in a local wing joint, waiting for my order to arrive.

A family of four entered and were seated beside me. The father entered the restaurant looking at his phone. He didn't put that phone down once, the entire time they were there.

While the mother fussed with the two young boys, helping them with their dinner, the father looked at his phone ? even when the meal arrived.

He ate the meal with one hand while his other hand manipulated the phone. He didn't say one word the entire time.

I felt like yelling out, ?put down the phone and interact with your family!?

I've seen couples enter a donut shop, order a coffee, then both pull out their phones and spend the next 20 minutes looking at the

phone while saying nothing to the person they are with.

I think if I sat down with a person to have a coffee with and they pulled out a phone instead of engaging in conversation, I would most likely say, "Well, have a nice night," get up and leave.

There are people that walk through a busy intersection while looking at their phone and are totally oblivious to what is happening around them.

I'm not sure what the stats are on people being hit by cars while phone walking, but I'm sure there have been several incidents. Winding up as a hood ornament because you are looking at your Facebook page isn't a good excuse for ending up in the emergency ward or local morgue.

The worst part of this situation is people are choosing a device rather than interacting with other people. I've been at parties, where a couple of people are off in the corner with a phone rather than conversing with others in the room. It's a party, not a solo trip on the Orient Express.

I've also been to dinner where the host, at the beginning of the meal, told everyone that cell phones are not allowed at the table. It's sad when a host has to ask guests in advance, to behave like people and not ruin her party.

Cell phones are a great convenience, but allowing them to interfere with your safety or social interaction won't do anyone any good.

Try putting that phone down until you really need it for a valid reason.