

Can't be with your kids? 'E-parent!' Technology helps keep tabs on kids from afar

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'Today' Parenting Front Page

GREENSBORO, N.C. - It's not his favorite meal, so Alex is happy to share the broccoli with his dad - who's home for dinner, even though he's 3,000 miles away on a business trip. And high school junior David Milgram knows he can never again tell his dad, "No homework." "Yeah, that excuse is long, long gone," says David. That's because homework assignments - and everything else that David does in school - are just a click away to his dad, Mark. "If he had cut class or skipped school, I would have learned that today," says Mark. Add "E-parenting" to the computer's expanding list of electronic jobs.

Marty Codus, who travels a lot, and his wife, Ashley, are turning their laptop, cell phones and PDA's into long-distance parenting tools. "It takes some of the bite out of being on the road," says Marty. "The most important thing is that Alex, our son, can actually see his dad," says Ashley. Dr. Addelaid Rod, who counsels "road warrior" parents, says that's important. "For younger children especially, the time until the next phone call can be very difficult," says Dr. Rod. With all the gadgets, staying in touch virtually is as easy as dialing the phone now.

But only recently have parents been able to plug in to what their kids are doing at school. At Palmer Trinity Prep School in Miami, every student uses a laptop. But it's their parents, using a relatively new program called "Edline," who are tracking their children's schedules, assignments, and even grades - the "E" way. School chief Sean Murphy sees parental involvement soaring. "It just gives them all the information they've wanted to know... and more," says Murphy. Students admit that with mom and dad checking up electronically, there's new reason now to toe the line. "My main motivation now is that my parents are going to see my grades," says David Milgram. It's not as good as being there, but the "E" way may be the next best thing.

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