NEWS LESSON

The Restaurants Asking Families to Put Their Phones Away



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Has a phone ever interrupted a meal you were enjoying?
2. Should a restaurant be allowed to set rules about how guests behave?
3. What is the difference between a comfortable silence and an awkward one?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**ombudsman**	☐	A	a small printed paper with information
2	**federation**	☐	B	done by choice, not because you must
3	**paediatricians**	☐	C	a group of organisations that work together
4	**initiative**	☐	D	a series of actions to achieve something
5	**campaign**	☐	E	more than is normal or needed
6	**excessive**	☐	F	a new plan to solve a problem
7	**voluntary**	☐	G	doctors who look after children
8	**leaflet**	☐	H	an official who protects people's rights

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Fifteen Sardinian restaurants are trying a new approach to family meals: fewer screens, more games and, they hope, more conversation.

1 Look around a restaurant while people are waiting for their food and you may notice a familiar scene: a family sitting together, each person absorbed in a separate screen. It can be a moment of welcome peace, particularly for tired parents. But a group of restaurants in Sardinia is asking whether those quiet minutes could be used differently.

2 Fifteen establishments on the Italian island have volunteered for a one-month pilot called “At the table without screens”. During the trial, parents and children dining at participating restaurants will be asked to put their devices away. The aim is not simply to remove phones, but to make room for the kind of conversation that can disappear when everybody is scrolling.

3 Families will be offered a “reunion kit” containing games and drawings. Designed with the Italian federation of paediatricians, the activities are intended to help children and parents interact, perhaps by sharing stories about their day. The kit also includes a leaflet about the risks of too much screen time and tips for managing social media at home.

4 The initiative is being led by Anna Cau, Sardinia's children's ombudsman and a former juvenile magistrate, with support from a local catering and tourism association. Cau argues that the burden should not fall entirely on parents, and that public settings ought to support them. The association's island president, Emanuele Frongia, said the fifteen restaurants had readily agreed to take part. He has noticed lively chatter giving way to stretches of silence as diners look at their devices, and said children are often handed one to keep them quiet.

5 Cau, who worked on the scheme with the Sardinian wing of the catering association Fipe-Confcommercio, describes it as a small step in a wider campaign to reduce excessive screen use among children. The games, she said, are deliberately given time limits so that they fit the length of a lunch or dinner.

6 It is easy to understand the appeal of the idea. A meal out can bring people together without anyone having to cook or wash up. Removing the usual distractions might make it easier to notice what someone else has to say. A game could also help families who find that the question “How was your day?” gets the same answer every evening.

7 Yet phones are not used only to escape conversation. They can help parents manage long waits, keep in touch with someone at home or deal with an unexpected problem. Some diners may feel that putting a screen away should be a personal choice rather than part of the restaurant's rules. Others may welcome having that decision made for them.

8 For now, the scheme is a limited experiment, not a ban across Sardinia, and the organisers plan to expand it only on a voluntary basis. The question for diners is simple: if everyone put their phone away, would dinner feel more enjoyable, or just a little longer?

Sources: The Guardian, Sardinian restaurants ban families from using phones at the table. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The reunion kit includes information for parents as well as activities for children. T F NG
2. Cau believes parents should deal with children's screen use alone. T F NG
3. The local association forced the restaurants to join the pilot. T F NG
4. Families will have to pay extra for the reunion kit. T F NG
5. The scheme covers only some of the restaurants in Sardinia. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

absorbed	appeal	burden	expand	interact	persuade	reluctant	unexpected

1. The children were so _____ in their drawings that they did not hear the waiter.
2. Looking after a baby alone can be a heavy _____ for one parent.
3. Many people understand the _____ of a quiet meal with no screens.
4. Games can help shy children _____ more easily at the table.
5. The waiter brought an _____ problem to the manager: the oven had stopped working.
6. If the trial goes well, the restaurants hope to _____ it to other towns.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Fifteen establishments _____ for a one-month pilot. (VOLUNTEER)
2. The project _____ by Anna Cau. (LEAD)
3. By the time the trial began, all fifteen restaurants _____ to take part. (AGREE)
4. Families _____ a reunion kit containing games and drawings. (OFFER)
5. Some diners feel that the decision _____ a personal choice. (BE (SHOULD))

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs have a particle that adds a clear idea: away means removed, together means joined, on and with link the verb to an object.

away below beyond on together up with

1. Guests were asked to put their phones _____ in a basket by the door.
2. It took months, and the group is still working _____ improving the games.
3. Parents often have to deal _____ tired children during a long wait.
4. Shared games can bring family members _____ for a laugh.
5. After a meal at home, someone has to cook and then wash _____ .

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Is a trial like this a helpful nudge, or does it go too far?
2. Parents are often blamed for their children's screen time. How fair is that?
3. What would actually get your family talking at the table?

9 Role-play: a phone-free table

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the restaurant manager

Your restaurant has joined the phone-free trial. A family has just sat down. Explain the rule and the reunion kit. Answer the parent's worries and decide if there can be any exceptions.

Student B · the parent

You are eating out with two children and you are expecting an important message. You don't like being told what to do. Ask questions, explain your problem and try to agree a solution.

Useful phrases

Could I just explain how it works?

I'm expecting an important message.

It's only for one meal, and we've got games for the children.

I'd rather decide that for myself.

What if there's an emergency?

Let's agree on a compromise.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you reach an agreement, and was the rule fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 C · 3 G · 4 F · 5 D · 6 E · 7 B · 8 A

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 absorbed · 2 burden · 3 appeal · 4 interact · 5 unexpected · 6 expand

6 Verb forms

1 have volunteered · 2 is being led · 3 had agreed · 4 will be offered · 5 should be

7 Language focus

1 away · 2 on · 3 with · 4 together · 5 up

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**