

On Dee's AirPods
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My 13-year-old daughter Dee lives with her mother in another state. Dee emailed me asking me to get her some AirPods, wireless earplugs that serve as earphones. Dee is an elite golfer and especially wanted to wear the AirPods to listen to music while she plays golf. This is my emailed reply to her. I carboned a copy to her mother.

Dear Dee (and Mom):

I've thought about the idea of getting Apple AirPods and here's where I am at this point. I'm not locked into this. What I say here is to start a conversation among the three of us about it. I've Cc'd this message to Mom, and invite her best thinking about this purchase as well as yours. I see communication technology use as a very important issue all three of us should work through together.

This is my thinking at the moment:

Cost is not an issue. We've got the money [around \$160]. Take price out of the consideration.

Earphones, AirPods—and iPhones--are good, but they have a big downside. They intrude upon, remove you from, cut you off from, the here-and-now reality you are in, including the other people around you. You should be very careful, very wise, about where and when you use earphones and iPhones. [Dee's middle school] knew what it was doing when it didn't allow phones in Hawaii [a class trip]. Hawaii was a better time for all of you without the phones.

I think we should get the AirPods. You say that they are top quality. It does seem good just to have small plugs in your ears and not have to contend with wires and cumbersome earphones. However, I think it best that you don't use AirPods when playing golf. I realize the big reason you want to get the

AirPods is for when you play golf, but they can be used in other contexts too. I define golf as from the moment you get in the car on the way to the golf course until the moment you get back home—no AirPods during that time. No AirPods in the car, on the course, at a restaurant after the round, or in the car on the way home.

Golf is about being away from everything in a beautiful and peaceful setting. It's the wind blowing and the rustling trees. It's total involvement and concentration in the activity, shot by shot, hole by hole. It's personal connection with your caddy or playing partner. Katy Perry, or whoever it is, blasting in your ear intrudes on that wonderful activity, distracts you from it, cuts you off from from it, makes golf jangly rather than restful and centering, distorts and diminishes the golfing experience.

One of the reasons golf has been so great is that it is activity you and Mom share—talking in the car going to the course, on the course discussing distances and strategy and which club to use, talking about the good and bad things that happen during the round, chatting about this and that and kidding around while playing, being together for soup or a sandwich afterwards, being with one another in the car on the way back home. I don't want Katy Perry to get between you and Mom.

A possible exception is using the AirPods while you are on the tee at a driving range or on a putting green, let's talk about that.

I can't imagine Lydia Ko and Justin Thomas [top professional golfers] playing golf to popular music blasting into their brains and compelling their attention. A big part of golf is attending to just the golf, single-pointed concentration. Golf isn't like painting a wall, a gross, inexact, mindless, activity, where listening to music at the same time is fine. Golf's about total engagement, precision, intense mental focus, rigorous analysis and decision-making, it's about learning to play in a highly disciplined and exact way.

I want the very best for you, Dee. I'm concerned that AirPods will hurt your development as a golfer. You have world-

class ability in golf. I don't want anything to get in the way of you realizing your potential in golf, even a little bit. A little bit is the difference between success and failure at the elite level in any sport, any activity. Back to Lydia and Justin, as brilliant as they are, playing against other great golfers as they do, they win or lose by a single stroke. Every little, tiny bit, the the most minute detail, matters in achieving success at the highest level. Anything that takes away, or even might take away, in the smallest way from your becoming all that you could become shouldn't be there, and as I see it, that includes the AirPods.

So I suggest getting the AirPods, but not using them while playing golf. What do you think, Dee? What do you think, Mom?

I'll wait to hear from you.

All my love,
Daddy

Later: Dee got the AirPods, but, with golf, they will only be used on the driving range and putting green. Dee says what I wrote in the email helped her understand things better, and that she thinks this limited use of the AirPods is best for her. Perhaps she decided that the only way to get the AirPods was to go along with this arrangement (which her mother supports), and that, really, she doesn't believe in this set-up. But it seems to me she does, or at least I'd like to believe she does, I hope she does. Anyway, I believe it is best.