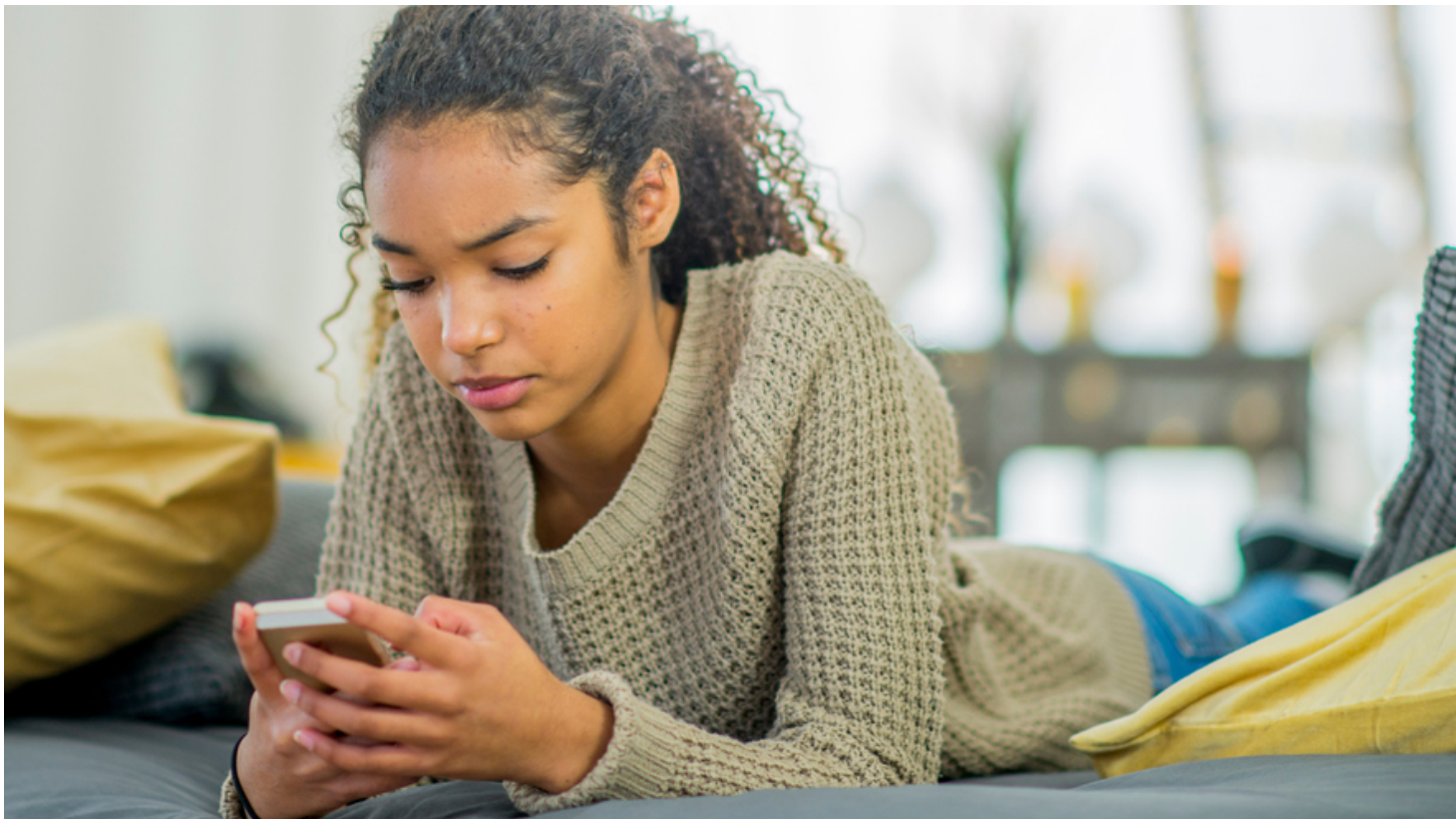


# Parents try to balance the way they communicate with their kids

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Texting at home may be a prelude to a deeper conversation. However, a dependence on devices may also impede learning social interaction and how to read body language, experts say. Photo by: FatCamera/Getty Images

When dinner's ready, many parents have traditionally yelled up the stairs to make the announcement to kids. For many, though, yelling is an ancient habit. Now they're texting kids instead.

Is texting under one roof yet one more example of our technology taking the place of face-to-face communications?

The act of texting one another in the same house may be built on the assumption that kids are already glued to a screen at the other end. It's quite likely they're on Instagram or playing a game, rather than reading or studying for the next day's exam. Does that mean you are encouraging their dependence on the device by communicating this way?

Many parents said they are perfectly cool with same-home texting.

**Is It Better To Text Than To Yell?**

Wendy Anton is a Michigan nurse. She not only texts with the family at home but communicates with them through Amazon Alexa, the home virtual assistant device. She says, "the adults will also text each other for the same reasons or even if we want to say things we don't want the kids to hear."

Yelling, in fact, may have negative consequences, says Dr. Pamela Rutledge. She's director of the Media Psychological Research Center in Newport Beach, California.

"It is an aggressive act and loses all the subtleties of regular voice without the benefit of adding an emoji for clarification," she says. "Humans react instinctively to certain behaviors," she says. Yelling make people get defensive right away. "If Mom yells, 'Come down here, please,' it's hard to know if you're in trouble or if she just needs to tell you something that yelling can't accomplish."

Pittsburgh psychologist Dr. Nancy Mramor says we often turn to technology when we think we're in trouble. People of all ages do this to avoid long or hard conversations, she says.

### **A Way To Start A Serious Talk**

We may message family members as a nudge. Sometimes, texting in the house can be a lead-in to a deeper conversation.

"I will let them text, then say come see me so we can talk," says Tamra Forsman, a mother of three in Washington state. "I try to balance out communicating in their way – text – and my way – conversation – because I realize relationships are give and take. Communication is so important, especially in the teen years. I am thankful for a text because a lot of teens would never text their mom."

Houston mom Kelli Jones Geiger has a teen daughter. She resisted texting at home with her for a long time. Now, however, the two sometimes text even when they're sitting next to each other on the couch.

"At 14, some things are hard to talk face-to-face with Mom about. I meet her at her level, and we are able to come together. I have the chance to edit my words before blurting them out. It opens up the lines of communication for both of us."

Kids may also see texting as a more comfortable way to start certain conversations.

In Chandler, Arizona, Amy Wing's 12-year-old daughter Erin explains to her mother why she texts her: "I text you when there's something difficult for me to talk about straight to your face, or if I'm tired or doing something, or if I'm with friends and don't want to go and talk to you. If you call me to come talk to you, I'll go. But if I need something and it doesn't have to be straight away, I'll text you."

Still, some parents remain firmly against the practice.

Katie May is a mother of six. She forbids texting in the house in favor of "forcing human interaction at all costs."

### **Social Skills Are Being Lost**

Does skipping eye contact in favor of screens have a lasting effect?

As a society today, says Mramor, "we've learned to do so many things dependently on our device." She says it's unfortunate that technology often leads us to have short responses, "as opposed to really talking something through. Reading of body language is not learned. Social skill in navigating a conversation is not learned."

Rutledge does not entirely agree. "We have this illusion that before cellphones, children would happily come downstairs for meaningful face time. Not so," she said. She said she is used to yelling up the stairs, "I can't understand what you're saying, please come down if you want to ask me something."

Rutledge sees another positive to texting.

"My kids send me pictures of their cats. That's nice because what it's really telling you is that they're thinking about you. It's really not about the cat – well mostly. What we don't talk about is those silly things make us feel more connected."

## Quiz

- 1 Which statement is a CENTRAL idea of the article?
- (A) Psychologists say that using technology is always better than yelling.
  - (B) Families who text are better at communicating than other families.
  - (C) Some parents use texting as a way to communicate with their kids.
  - (D) Texting should not be allowed at home because it gets in the way of body language.
- 2 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) It's quite likely they're on Instagram or playing a game, rather than reading or studying for the next day's exam.
  - (B) Many parents said they are perfectly cool with same-home texting.
  - (C) She says, "the adults will also text each other for the same reasons or even if we want to say things we don't want the kids to hear."
  - (D) People of all ages do this to avoid long or hard conversations, she says.

- 3 Read the sentence from the section "A Way To Start A Serious Talk."

*She forbids texting in the house in favor of "forcing human interaction at all costs."*

What is one way the placement of this sentence develops the way parents feel about texting instead of talking?

- (A) It elaborates on the problems texting is causing for teens.
  - (B) It introduces the contrasting point of view against texting.
  - (C) It emphasizes the positive effects of human interaction.
  - (D) It illustrates problems with getting teens to stop texting.
- 4 How effective is the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] at introducing the topic of how parents feel about texting at home?
- (A) It is very effective because it uses a familiar anecdote to ask questions about the way texting is changing communication with teens and parents.
  - (B) It is very effective because it uses an expert opinion to outline problems with encouraging teens' dependence on their devices by texting them at home.
  - (C) It is not very effective because it describes the effects of yelling rather than texting without exploring what causes families to start this habit.
  - (D) It is not very effective because it explores ideas about yelling to get kids to come for dinner without showing how the practice has changed over time.