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KLynn Counseling

 a place for new beginnings

**“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”**

[**George Bernard Shaw**](http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/George%2BBernard%2BShaw/1/index.html)

We have so many ways to communicate now. We can stay in touch with people continually. People can contact us anytime, anywhere. It can seem like we are never alone. Many people feel insecure if they do not have a cell phone with them. Texting has now been added to the list of addictions. Our kids seem to be particularly vulnerable to the influence of social media and electronic communications. If you have teenagers in your home, how many uninterrupted meals do you have? Are they texting as dinner is being eaten, sometimes at the same time you are talking to them? Do you find it almost impossible to get them to set the phone aside? Are they on FaceBook? If so, how many friends do they have and do they actually know them? Do you?

This month I would like to speak to parents about the issues involving their children and these electronic forms of “communication”. I will start by saying that I am not against texting, although I still prefer actually talking to someone rather than texting them. I am also not against FaceBook. I have a FaceBook page that has given me the ability to connect with old friends that I might never have found – some who had been near and dear to me and I had just lost track of. But in saying that, let me emphasize that I am an adult, and FaceBook was originally designed for adults – for a reason.

In my profession I work with kids on a regular basis for whom texting and social media have become not just an addiction, but a dangerous one. I worked with one young lady who actually became violent and punched her foster mother when the mother requested that the texting stop during a family dinner. I would like to look at some of the dangers associated with these forms of communication, and then give some ways that these dangers might be counteracted. That children open themselves up to predators is an obvious safety risk that we have heard a lot about in the news. It is a very real threat that you can take steps to lessen, but there is also another problem that I see developing that gets less attention. It appears to me that the more technical ways are created to stay in touch, the less we actually are in touch. Interaction skills appear to be eroding.

I have experience with a number of kids who text constantly. It can be difficult to hold a face to face conversation with them because they are either texting outright, or if they are sitting at a table, they are surreptitiously texting under the table and trying to hide it. At best, I receive token eye contact and only partial brain contact! These messages are minimal, use poor grammar skills, and do not constitute any real meaningful communication. Many teachers have found it to be almost impossible to keep students attention as there is a continual battle to stop texting in the classroom. Today’s essays and formal papers are full of texting lingo that have worn away grammar skills. Cheating by texting has become an art form.

What are some general ways for parents to combat this growing problem? First I would suggest that if your children are young enough that they have not yet been caught up in this growing addiction, you lay down the boundaries for usage and you put appropriate guards on any phone that is given to your child before there is a problem. Next, contact your phone carrier. All major carriers have parental control features available for little or no charge. With many of them you can set time of day and time limits on calls, downloads, and text messages. It also allows you to block calls. You can restrict websites and the content they can access.

If your child is already having problems with a possible addiction to texting, curtailing use can be a little more difficult. It might be advisable to begin cutting down usage a step at a time. Perhaps not allowing the cell to be used during family dinner times or not allowing usage during school class time would be a start. Usage time is another thing that can be monitored on your phone bill. Boundaries might start with the request that texting stop during class time, letting your child know that you will trust them to monitor this on their own until they prove they are unable to. At that time blocking can be put in place to help them. It is always a good idea to allow kids to build trust on their own if possible. You always want to take the route of building a relationship of trust rather than eroding it.

FaceBook has become another highly popular form of electronic communication that presents a danger to adolescents who do not have the maturity to protect themselves. I have seen children who have over a thousand friends, the large majority of whom they are totally unacquainted with. It has become a game to rack up as many friends as possible and to accept friend requests from total strangers. Most adults can see the risk involved with this, but many teenagers do not comprehend it. The Bible tells us that, “**Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child. . . Proverbs 22:15**. It is our job as parents to do the wise thing, even when it’s unpopular. I have dealt with a number of instances in which predators or mentally unstable people have obtained access to phone numbers or addresses and showed up at the home wanting to gain entrance.

Parents should not only be on their child’s friend list, they should have access to their password. It is important that both you and your child actually know the people that are on that “friend” list. Young people many times have trouble discerning existing dangers. Make sure that your child is not posting photos that could be embarrassing at a later time or should not be in the hands of the wrong person. Even if you delete these photos, someone could have already downloaded them, and it will be out of your hands. Also go to Account Settings and be sure that their page is only viewable by “friends” not “everyone”.

While these are basic safety suggestions, the best weapon you have in protecting your child is your relationship with him or her. All of this is supposed to be about relating to people. A solid trusting relationship with your child based on loving honest communication is the best defense in keeping your child safe. If your relationship is solid, then you are on the same side. You aren’t battling each other. When trust is strong, then you have an account that you can draw on. In next month’s edition we are going to look at ways to build and solidify that relationship with your child, adolescent, or teenager.

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**“Electric communication will never be a substitute for the face of someone who with their soul encourages another person to be brave and true.”**

[**Charles Dickens**](http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/Charles%2BDickens/1/index.html)