

solutions

LET'S REALLY TALK

Throughout history, philosophical debates have arisen over the use of technology, with disagreements arising over whether advances improve the human condition or worsen it. Today's parents, educators and mental health professionals are concerned about the effects of digital media upon the youth. Specifically, developmental psychologists are studying the impact of technology on young people's social development. Sherry Turkle, a psychologist and a professor at MIT has studied the relationship between humans and machines and her findings indicate that network technology is changing what we do as well as who we are.

Recent social research supports what most parents already know: the form and substance of communication has changed dramatically and conversation is being replaced by electronic communication. Although young people are talking more than ever, through texts, e-mails, phone calls, on Facebook and Twitter, they are not talking with anyone. Many parents who learned the art of conversation (before the information age) have the interpersonal skills they need to navigate off-line in the world. Young people lack that advantage because technology is implicated in stunting interpersonal growth. Children are growing up being connected all the time, but they are not learning how to have a conversation, or to participate in a give and take of ideas, or to be fully present and vulnerable. They have little

practice learning to make eye contact, becoming aware of another person's posture and tone, comforting one another and respectfully challenging one another. In summary, they are missing opportunities to learn who they are, to develop a stable sense of self, a trust of others and the capacity for empathy, friendship, and intimacy. They need their parents help!

The good news is that your children are still watching what you are doing and modeling that behavior. No one wants to give up their phones, nor do we need to. We do need to be more mindful about how and when to use them so our children can learn and practice interpersonal skills. You can begin by introducing these ideas to your children as new elements of your family's culture:

- Choose not to carry your phones all the time.
- Put your phones in a central room and go to them every hour or two while you work on other things, or talk to other people.
- Carve out spaces at home that are device-free, sacred spaces where only actual conversation or solitude occur.
- Decide what times you could exclude devices (at dinner, in the kitchen, in the car).

For the failing connections of our digital world, talking is the cure.

Resources:

Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age, Sherry Turkle (2015)

Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other, Sherry Turkle (2012)

The App Generation, Howard Gardner and Katie Davis (2014)

PARENTS MATTER: *Teaching children how to communicate politely and effectively is one of a parent's most important tasks.*