

# TEXTING TEENS

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Last night I watched a TV news story about teens not getting enough sleep. They are in their rooms all right but, instead of sleeping, they are texting their friends or chatting on line. The story included a teen admitting that she realized how unwise she had been by getting only four hours' sleep (because of texting) when she was facing a test the next morning.

Recently we had a family staying in our home. Since they had flown in from overseas I was very surprised to see their 15 year-old daughter Jane lugging her laptop with her. Then we observed that, at every opportunity, she would sit in a corner glued to her computer and stay up late into the night (after everyone had gone to bed) chatting to her friends. What was also disturbing to us was that her parents did not appear to be aware of what she was doing or to see this as inappropriate and potentially addictive behavior.

I heard the illustration once that if you put a frog in a pan of cold water and slowly heat it, the frog will not jump out to save itself. Have we become so used to, and reliant on, the latest and greatest innovative technology that we cannot live without it? Shortly after TV was invented it became a most convenient baby sitter, and before long our children began to lose their skills of imaginative play. Now that we have moved on to computers and hand-held devices our kids take them everywhere and the temptation to text or talk to their friends at every opportunity is inevitable. By doing so they are actually losing the art of face-to-face communication. If, for some reason kids have these devices taken off them, they will often go into panic mode. The TV program I was watching stated that many teens sleep with their phones under their pillow or on their night stand in a friend calls or texts in the middle of the night.

How do we ensure that our children retain their imagination, communicate well on a one-to-one level and use their computers and phones in a healthy and balanced manner? It is very important to create daily household routines that include times for physical activity, times for homework, for chores and then times for sedentary activities like watching TV, reading and computer time. Most of all they need a set time for sleep.

There should be rules for phone use, texting and computer chat time. I suggest that teens pay for their own text messaging over a certain number of texts. I also suggest the banning of phones at meal times, including restaurants. It is a very good idea not to allow teens to text or talk on the phone or computer after a given time at night. It may be necessary to refuse them these devices in their rooms between say 10 p.m. and after school. There are rules for phone usage at school and parents need to endorse the school requirements.

I have heard of parents experimenting by turning off their TV for a week or a month. If texting and computer chatting were also banned for a given time, it would help kids to see the value of live conversation and promote the idea of creating their own fun. Try it. It will reduce reliance on others to provide our entertainment and encourage a greater awareness of the exciting world around

Am I against technology? Not at all! I own a laptop and a PC computer, an Iphone, an Ipod, a flat screen HDTV, and a Facebook account and I wheel and deal selling things on the Internet. My point is in teaching our children to moderate their use of technology tools in favor of real face-to-face world and the need for self-control for other activities - like sleep. It is so easy to get caught up and even be consumed by the technology available. It is unhealthy to develop compulsive behavior and lose out on developing imagination and real in-the-face relationships.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at [sally@forefrontfamilies.org](mailto:sally@forefrontfamilies.org). We invite you to also check out our website at [www.forefrontfamilies.org](http://www.forefrontfamilies.org) and our blog site at [www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com](http://www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com) for further assistance.