

## **TEXTING**

### **“Texting: Better than Oral Communication? Controllable or Uncontrollable?” Dean Borgman, CYS, January 2010**

#### **OVERVIEW**

So, I’ve found out, there’s a lot of texting going on. Yes, it’s more popular than Emailing, than Facebook, than Twitter, in fact sometimes even more comfortable than cell-phoning. Well, if this is true, I think we adults, parents and youth leaders, can deal with it,... but we’re faced with at least three important issues.

When they’re sitting together at a social time, when they’re in the same car, is it natural, is it good, for them to text each other rather than facing each other eye-to-eye and talk—the way people have throughout history? Some folks even think their texting like this can be rude; they don’t; do you?

Secondly, research points to a doubling of texting between early 2008 and early 2009. Texting teens, 13-17, send an average of 2,899 text messages a month, or an average of 96 texts per day (. Are those texting over 100 messages a day doing so way too much? Can refining such a method of communication, and limiting other forms, restrict social and relational skills necessary in a complex world.

Then, some parents and youth leaders are saying that rules against or limiting such communicating are futile, can backfire, and is generally counter-productive, do you agree?

Discuss this issue with most “texters,” and they’re usually vague as to exactly why they prefer texting to other forms of communication. Further conversation may lead to the various reasons and benefits: that they are attached to the small screen, it’s “the way to go” these days, it gives freedom to can say things you wouldn’t say out loud, that it’s a safer way of expressing yourself more fully—all in all that it’s just normal.

First of all, it’s important we don’t approach this subject as a problem, but as a phenomenon open for discussion—with cell texters themselves as our experts. Next, we should begin with the benefits of texting: its availability, its ease, its extension of community and connections.

But the very busyness of their lives, the stress of too many activities, academic and other responsibilities is taking a toll on many young people. Multi-tasking and texting can add to that stress. Of course, texting while driving or walking through traffic have already caused injury and death—and is a matter so

important as to be dealt with separately. Stress is increased by lack of sleep and some studies (one in Belgium) has shown that teenagers actually are awakened to text, some several times a week or even every night. One psychologist (Sherry Turkle of MIT) has found that heavily texting teenagers have a more difficult time individuating, breaking away from their parents.

We should be most concerned about healthy maturation, about ability in social skills and actual face to face communication, about the ability to focus on a single idea or issue for a sustained period of time, and the ability to appreciate personal reflection times in silence.

And yes, we can control or limit and negotiate the amount of time a pre-teen and teenager spends with and without his or her cell phone. There are family times and there are youth group situations (meal times or family discussions/prayers, camps, retreats and meetings) where no text messaging is allowed. Between Luddism (throw the gadgets out the window) and *laissez faire* (anything goes) there is a happy and profitable medium where we can use technology without being its slaves.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. What interests you in this topic? Do you come to it with dogmatic opinions or genuine questions?
2. How would you critique this article? What impressed you here? With what did you agree or disagree?
3. How relevant and how important is this issue? For what reasons?
4. How would you go about promoting a discussion of text messaging in your family, a class, or in a youth group?

## **IMPLICATIONS**

1. Historic changes in communication patterns have had significant social impact.
2. The wide (global) use of cell phones and text messaging is one of the most striking innovations, among adolescents and children, of the twenty-first century.
3. We can only profitably negotiate life-style boundaries with teenagers after we have come to understand the issues from their point of view, when we begin the discussion hearing their stories and opinions—and considering the positives or benefits first before moving on to possible dangers.
4. There is always a distinction to be made between prohibition and limited access.

5. Further scientific research and local group or class surveys on this subject are needed because we're dealing with such a fluid, changing youth culture, and because surveys are a great basis for profitable discussions.

Dean Borgman c. CYS