

Ask Dr. K®: Writings For Your Mental Health

DOES ANY TEEN NOT HAVE A CELL PHONE?

Dear Dr. K,

My sixteen-year-old teen has a cell and constantly uses it. Despite what appears to be her always in touch with someone, I'm afraid that her using the cell instead of actually talking with a friend is hurting her development. She says I'm crazy and that this is the only way to keep in touch.

What do you think?

Confused Mom in St. Petersburg

Dear Mom,

I share your concern about the extreme amounts of time teens spend on cell phones (and internet) in communicating. I also share your fear that teenagers in general are not developing the necessary social skills to interact with others in business, school and especially personal situations as they grow into adulthood. The teenage years are ones where you learn how to relate to others; how to make friends, how to keep friends, how to talk with authority figures (teachers, relatives, coaches, etc.), how to relate socially. This includes being able to learn how to assert yourself, discuss disagreements, affirm pleasant things, and learn how to get along in the world. It's a time of acquiring the tools to navigate the social part of life in adulthood which hopefully will help in having a happy personal relationship, a sense of confidence in dealing with others (rather than feeling shy, inept, taken advantage of) and assertiveness.

Although teens appear to be communicating all the more (the example being the Dad who got a bill for 15,000 texts by his daughter in one month), I believe these forms of communication have become almost devoid of the humanness that goes into communicating with each other. They have lost the personal touch of hearing the human voice filled with the color of emotion, the nuances of speech and the face to face interaction from which we all should learn how to get along with others. I don't find leaving a text message as beneficial in learning to grow up. Sure, it's convenient but we're not talking about "honey, pick up some milk on your way home" convenient. We're talking about dealing with the human interactions that teens need to learn so they're ready for adulthood in learning to deal with directly times of caring and times

Dr. K is Stan Kapuchinski, M.D., a board-certified psychiatrist still practicing in Punta Gorda, FL. For an appointment or if you have questions, please email him at DrK@StopYourMisery.com. Dr. K's book, *Say Goodbye To Your PDI (Personality Disordered Individual), Recognize People Who Make You Miserable and Eliminate Them From Your Life for Good!* is available at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble Booksellers, and HCI Books. Visit his website: www.StopYourMisery.com

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of confrontation. Times of confronting things, good or bad. It certainly is much easier to express yourself behind the anonymity of texting or emailing than the challenge of doing it face to face. Yet it's that face to face that helps gain those social skills and confidence in handling ourselves that we all need. I view much of the texting as creating a sense that someone else really wants to hear about 'everything'. Then the other person responds because they want to be heard.

It is extremely easy to become whoever you want to be in a text or email but facing people head on, expressing how you feel with them in front of you, seeing their response, listening to their response face to face is essential in growing up. It's nice to get a text saying "I love you" but certainly a thousand times better having it said to you face to face. People with difficulties expressing their emotions show a huge problem about which many books have been written. I fear that texting, emails, blogging, twitter and all the rest will further isolate people while seemingly doing the opposite. Think about the couple sitting at a candlelight meal and the guy is so uncomfortable he texts her "I love you". Sounds silly, but you wonder when that's going to happen. So, Mom, you can't take away the cell phone but you can certainly encourage your teen to talk more with you, her friends and people. You can encourage her to express herself in school and solve problems that arise face to face rather than your doing it for her or her avoiding it.

Dr. K.