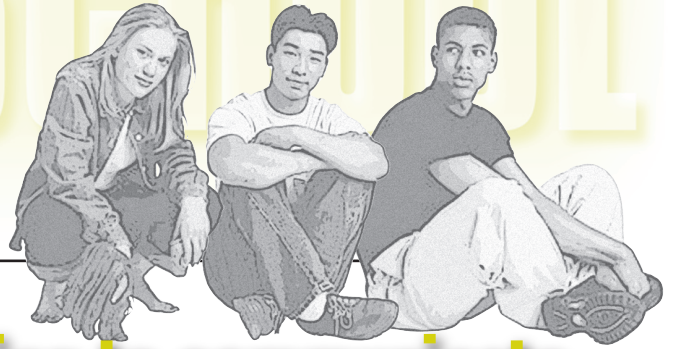


HIGH SCHOOL PARENT



Can you hear me now? Learning to communicate

During his campaign, President Obama texted the media and his supporters to announce his choice of Joe Biden as his running mate. The message is clear; electronic communication is here to stay.

But communication is more than brief snippets of coded words or personal photos shared with friends. Merriam Webster defines “communicate” as “to convey knowledge of or information about; make known.” in other words, people communicate every time they write, speak, or act.

The challenge arises when teens fail to distinguish between communicating with peers and communicating in the academic and business worlds. TTYL (talk to you later) may work with friends, but would hardly impress a potential employer. Helping teens understand the need to communicate effectively with all groups is a key to lifelong success.

Three forms of communication

The written word—Today, most teens grab their cell phones to text—not to call.

Ask teens why they text rather than speak and you will likely get responses like, “I wanted an answer, but didn’t have time to talk,” or “I didn’t want to talk, I just wanted to say ‘hi.’” It makes perfect sense to teens, but the idea of one-sided messages without the instant feedback of conversation baffles many parents and employers.

Written communication is not limited to the cell phone. Teens fill their Facebook and MySpace pages with everything from one-line updates to poetry or musical lyrics that speak to their lives. Although social networking sites are now a normal peer-to-peer communication tool, they come with risks. Many teens naively think that their quotes and photos are private when in fact universities and employers often use those personal pages as sources of more information on applicants.

This abbreviated and informal writing can work its way into the more detailed writing a student needs in school or an employee needs in the workplace. If the reader doesn’t fully understand a particular expression or coded phrase, the intended message gets lost.

For example, a local employer complained that his highly educated staff frequently used abbreviated text or local slang when e-mailing international clients. Those e-mails often left clients confused, offended, or angry because the clients misunderstood the sender’s intent. Whether crafting an English paper or filling out a job application, teens must write clearly or risk losing the message.

The spoken word—Few things can stir human passions more effectively than conversation. A well-constructed sentence, delivered clearly and

audibly, both conveys the thought and reflects well upon the speaker. When teens speak, they must recognize that how they speak is often as important as what they say.

A young law student discovered that her speech was filled with “like” and “uh.” A thoughtful professor pointed out that this sloppy conversation made her sound unintelligent and disorganized, two traits that would limit her success in the courtroom. Determined to become successful, she “relearned” how to speak.

The “unspoken” word—Appearance and behavior are equally important communication tools. People judge others by what they see in addition to what they hear or read. A teen who wears a dirty shirt to an interview or stares out the window may appear disrespectful or inattentive. Although the teen may have a good explanation (like a flat tire on the way to the interview), that first impression becomes a hurdle to overcome.)

Everyone has the right to express themselves through personal clothing, hairstyles, jewelry or mannerisms, but those choices may come with consequences. It is important that teens understand that the image they present can impact their ability to communicate the desired message.

A parent’s role

Parents who encourage their teens to perform their best in the classroom or on the athletic field, may sometimes overlook the communication skills. Consider the following suggestions to help your children improve their futures by improving their communication skills today:

Model good communication at home. Take time to talk with your kids. Talk about sports, current events, family concerns or any other interest you might share. It’s good practice and goes a long way toward improving your parent-child relationship as well.

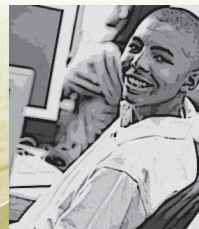
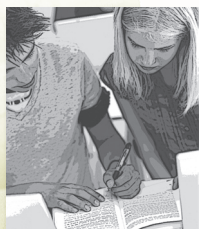
Encourage your teen to write a letter or an e-mail. Writing forces teens to more carefully consider what they say and how they say it.

Encourage your children to call. Sure, they can text yes or no questions, but when the answers are more complex, have them dial the phone. A two-way conversation avoids confusion and often yields more satisfying results.

Help them to see themselves. Help them understand that good communicators look at themselves through others’ eyes. Is the image your teen presents going to help or hinder the message? But, be careful not to let the conversation erode into a battle over their latest hair color or style of dress.

Help them plan ahead to avoid unintended results. A little planning before they write, text, or call can prevent an unclear message or a misunderstanding.

Encourage them to ask themselves basic questions such as, “Who is my audience; what message do I want to send; and what method of communicating will best make my point?”





Online safety for teens

Warning signs come on music and movies, but what about the Internet? If one alert could be plastered across the Web, it might be: “Warning: Parental guidance and dialogue are recommended, even for know-it-all, tech-savvy teens.”

Teenagers crave independence in everything they do, including net navigation. They may exude confidence with technology, but parents cannot mistake knowledge for responsible behavior. Following are tips to help you help your teen reap the rewards while avoiding the risks of the Internet.

- **Place the home computer in a public area.** This will make teens think twice about going to sites and entering chats they know are inappropriate. It will also be easier for you to observe if they unknowingly enter unsafe areas.
- **Affirm teens’ tech skills.** You may feel intimidated by your children’s superior knowledge of the Internet. Turn the situation around and ask them to show you what they know. This is empowering for them and informative for you.
- **Teach privacy.** Teens should never give out personal information without your permission, including name, e-mail, address, school, phone number and photos. Let them know what they risk if they ignore this rule: At minimum, their information could be sold to and misused by another website. At worst, a person they are chatting with could misrepresent himself or herself for harmful purposes. For example, a “15-year-old boy from the next town over” could be a 40-year-old sexual predator. All Internet users, children and adults, should read a website’s privacy policy before giving out personal data.
- **Instruct your teen NEVER to meet with online acquaintances.** The single greatest danger of the Internet is a virtual acquaintance taking advantage of your child in a real meeting.
- **Tell your teen not to respond to offensive or dangerous communications** – even if it means ignoring a degrading remark. If you suspect online “stalking” or sexual exploitation, report it to the police. **The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children** (www.missingkids.com) also has a system to identify online predators and child pornographers. You can use its link “CyberTipline” to file a complaint.
- **Require your son or daughter to use child-friendly search engines**, such as **Yahooligans** and **Google**. These search engines and others (ask a librarian or visit www.searchengine-watch.com/links/Kids_Search_Engines) will direct your teens to websites that respect privacy and hold generally acceptable materials for children. If your teen needs to use other search engines, explore them together. It is an opportunity to participate in his or her academic life.



- **Teach your child how to recognize reliable sources.** For a science research project, studies from a scientific journal’s website are going to be more useful than ones from politically motivated groups. On the other hand, there is plenty of room for differing opinions. Show your teen how you would choose between sources and ensure that he or she cites those sources so the teacher can keep an eye out for plagiarism and accuracy.
- **Consider filtering technology.** If you are concerned about what your teen is viewing online, you may want to use filtering software. The programs all work differently and each has its own advantages. So before buying or searching online, determine what you are trying to block. Filters may control outgoing or incoming mail, illegal sites, sexual material or violence and hate activities. They can also limit online time and leave a record of online activities that parents can review at a later point.
- **Talk honestly about risks.** These include meeting people with bad intentions, relinquishing privacy, getting into online fights, being lured into breaking the law, accessing inappropriate material, mistaking lies for truths, and accessing dangerous substances. See www.getnetwise.com/safetyguide for more on each of these risks.
- **Encourage your teen to confide in you.** When your son or daughter comes across something objectionable, don’t react by taking away Internet privileges. This will teach your teen to avoid confiding in you in difficult situations. Instead, talk about the issues encountered.

Think of the Internet as a tool to teach not only information-gathering but also critical thinking and use of sound judgment. According to www.GetNetWise.com, “Today it’s the Internet; tomorrow it may be deciding whether it’s safe to get into the car of someone a teen meets at a party. Later it will be deciding whether a commercial offer really is ‘too good to be true’ or whether it really makes sense to vote for a certain candidate or follow a spiritual guru. Learning how to make good choices is a skill that will last a lifetime.”

“...learning to communicate”

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