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# CCCHC

## Child Care Health Consultation

..for a HEALTHY START in child care

## TEXTS, SEXTS, WHAT'S NEXT?

Carol Roy-Bernstein

A mother with her three teenage daughters sat in my office the other day. Two of the girls were there for sick visits. The third sister was just along for the ride. When I walked into the room, all three girls had their heads buried in their cellphones, thumbs pumping furiously, texting away. No one even looked up. The mom and I started to chat about the symptoms the sick girls were exhibiting. But the mother was either distracted by the clicking or felt the girls were being rude, and she soon made the two sick teens turn their phones off. The pair grudgingly obeyed, sticking the devices in their purses, but not before whining, "Why doesn't she have to stop?" "Because she's not the one with the doctor's visit," Mom replied. "But she's the one who's texting us!" the girls protested in unison.

I was speechless. Here were three sisters in a room together communicating with their thumbs. That encounter really hammered home to me just how plugged in we have all become. We are suffused in a multitude of digital communication options daily. According to a recent Pew research study, one in three teens sends or receives over 100 text messages a day.

It's not that texting is inherently bad. Like many other forms of communication, it has the potential to keep us connected. But Sherry Turkle, MIT professor and author of "Alone Together: Why we Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other" suggests that while constant

texting may give the appearance of increased connectedness, these technologies may actually be keeping us isolated from each other. She argues that "Facebooking" is not socializing. "Thumbs up or thumbs down on a website is not a conversation."

Texting can also be dangerous. Texting while driving can be so deadly it is banned in many states. I cringe at the gym watching folks text while walking downstairs or running on treadmills. They look like accidents waiting to happen, like that poor woman whose Youtube video went viral when she fell into a fountain texting at a mall.

Children should be taught to turn off their cellphone when engaged in any activity that requires their full attention: school, homework, babysitting. Children also need to understand that some forms of texting like sexting (sending nude or inappropriate photos in a text message) or cyber-bullying (sending mean, taunting or embarrassing text messages) can have disciplinary consequences at school and even legal ramifications. Another new issue being raised about texting is its effect on teens' sleep. We are learning more and more about teens who bring their cellphones into their bedrooms and text long into the night.

Technology is developing at a rate that may be faster than our ability to monitor it and ensure its safe use. Parents should have frank conversations with their children about the dangers of texting and driving and the negative emotional and sometimes legal consequences of sexting and cyber-bullying. Parents should review their children's text logs to see who is texting them, when and how often. Limits can be placed on the number of texts sent and received as well as the hours texting is allowed. And parents can certainly confiscate phones after a reasonable hour, if necessary.

We need to be good role models for our children as well. While many parents take their kids' cellphones away from them during our office visits so we can have face-to-face conversations, I have just as many parents who are themselves texting during our visits. And my heart breaks whenever I see a mom or dad texting in the bleachers of their kids' big game instead of watching their children play. We have to be careful what kind of example we are setting. If we are disengaged with our children, can it be long before they'll disengage with us?



# PARENT MAGIC!

We want our children to behave. We want to keep our cool. We want a peaceful, loving family life. How do we achieve these goals? Through trial and error? Hit and miss? Luck? Unlikely. Through knowledge and skill? YES! Parents who use good skills have a magic power to create more peace in their homes. Let's examine some of the most potent magic skills:

## Ask helpful questions.

The most important discipline goal we have as a parent is not to make our kids behave. Rather, it is to help our kids develop into confident, self-disciplined people. We can help children learn to listen to their "inner voice" and help them develop self-discipline by asking helpful questions. What makes this work is not just the type of questions, but the delivery: thoughtful and free from anger and criticism. When we yell, blame, and accuse, our kids focus on our anger and do not learn from the experience. When we guide our children by using helpful questions we point them in the right direction.

### What's not helpful?

- Why did you do that?
- What's the matter with you?
- How many times do I ...?
- Why can't you ever....?

### What are helpful questions?

- How do you feel about that?
- What will you do now?
- How do you think she feels?
- How can we solve this?

After you ask the question, sit back quietly and listen. You may be delighted to see your child solving his or her own problem. Parents become frustrated with their children for not listening to them. Often listening is not the problem - understanding is the problem! Instead of saying, "Be good!" Be very specific: "Please sit still and use a quiet voice." Instead of, "This bedroom is a disaster area." It's more effective to be clear and specific, "Before lunch today, please put your clothes in the closet, books on the shelf and dishes in the kitchen."

### Just the facts, please.

Parents clutter their communication with unnecessary and hurtful phrases. "You always.... You never... You make me... You are such a...." Make an effort to state only the facts, so instead of bellowing, "How many times do I have to tell you to turn that music down. It's too loud. Why do you always ignore me?" Try this, "John, please turn the music down, or shut it off."

### Follow through. Pick your battles. And when you pick one - win it!

Parents often make a request and then back off when the child becomes difficult. In the example above, if John doesn't turn down the music, how many parents would mumble, complain, yell, or nag about it? It is important in the parent-child relationship for you to win your battles. You can calmly walk into John's room, turn off his radio yourself, look him in the eye and say, "I expect you to listen to me." If John is a real stinker, you can take the radio with you and tell him he can have it back, along with another chance, tomorrow.

# HOLIDAY SAFETY

The holiday season is a time to celebrate, give thanks, and reflect. It is also a special time to pay attention to your health! Give the gift of health and safety to yourself and others this year by following these holiday tips!

- Consider buying a fire-resistant artificial tree.
- If you use fresh trees, set away from heat sources such as fire places and vents.
- Decorate trees using only UL-approved lights and cords.
- Turn off tree lights when you go to sleep or leave home.
- Keep small ornaments and other decorations out of reach of small children.
- Securely anchor all hanging decorations.
- Do not obstruct handrails.
- Keep poisonous plants out of reach.
- Keep hot food and candies out of reach.
- Do not place candles near draperies or anything that might easily catch fire.
- Open the flue in your fireplace before lighting a fire.
- After building a fire, always use a screen.
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- Never leave young children unattended.

*Choking on toys can cause death in young children. So this holiday season, consider these tips for choosing safe toys:*

- Make sure the toy meets national safety standards by looking for the letters "ASTM." These letters show the toy has been tested for normal intended use and reasonable foreseeable abuse.
- Read toy instructions carefully.
- Obey the manufacturer age recommendations.
- Do not give toys with small parts to young children.
- Have separate play areas for young children so that they don't have access to older siblings' toys with small parts.
- Watch for toys with strings, straps or cords because these could wrap around a child's neck.
- Be careful of toys that use electricity.
- Be aware of toys with sharp points or edges.
- Throw away damaged toys.

*The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following toys for each age group:*

### Newborn to 1 year:

- Large plastic or wooden blocks
- Busy boards
- Rattles

### 1-2 years old

- Nesting blocks
- Cloth or plastic books with large pictures
- Kiddy cars

### 2-5 year olds

- Simple puzzles
- Dress-up clothes
- Outdoor toys, including swing sets

### 5-9 year olds

- Card games
- Jump rope
- Basketball, soccer ball

### 10-14 year olds

- Computer
- Board games

## SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD, or "Winter Blues") is a common complaint in the winter in both children and adults. It manifests in ways similar to depression, and may indeed be confused with major depression.

Though dysfunctional in modern society, SAD was once an adaptation to decreased availability of food in the winter. People with SAD burn fewer calories and were better able to cope with winter starvation in primitive societies.

*Today, the most common symptoms of SAD include:*

- Change in sleep habits, inability to get out of bed, lack of interest, lack of exercise
- Irritability, sadness, low self-esteem
- Lack of concentration, difficulty in school
- Lack of desire to be with other people, social isolation
- Craving for carbohydrates

SAD is thought to be caused by a number of factors present in the winter, and it is most prevalent at high latitudes where winter is darkest. The lack of sunlight causes increased production of melatonin by the pineal gland. Melatonin acts as a sleep inducer in the brain, which causes changes in sleeping habits.

A decrease in production of vitamin D in the skin also accounts for some of the symptoms, and enforced isolation and inactivity contribute to depression. There may also be some unfulfilled expectations related to the winter holidays that may further exacerbate the low mood. Perhaps not surprisingly, SAD is seven times more common in New England than in Florida, and occurs in approximately 10% of Scandinavians and 20% of Irish.

The diagnostic approach to SAD is two-fold: first, doctors evaluate the patient for the possibility of a physical ailment that mimics depression, such as thyroid disease, anemia, hypoglycemia, mononucleosis, and others. Second, doctors assess the patient for major depression, which must be taken more seriously.

There are several effective treatments for SAD. Exposure to bright diffuse light helps, as does exercise; these explain the popularity of beach and skiing vacations, and our positive response to snowfall despite its inconvenience. Air ionizers can also help because they replace UV-generated ions that are more prevalent in the summer. Low prevalence of SAD in Iceland, which correlates with high fish intake, suggests fish oil and Vitamin D can also be given as treatments.

Finally, parents need to recognize and treat SAD in themselves, as children often acquire the mood of the adults in the household. A happy adult is better able to provide the comfort and empathy that a child with SAD needs most of all.

*By Anatoly Belilovsky, MD*

**Pediatrics**forParents

Information for anyone who cares for children.



## TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT POLITICS

Every four years political dialogue—in homes, in schools, in public places—across this country reaches an excited pitch. Thanks to the fact that kids have access to more information through television, computers, cell phones, CDs, video games, the Internet, etc., they are exposed to more of this dialogue than ever before. Although the media are ubiquitous, they are not the only source of information for kids. More often than not, parents express their own political opinions in casual conversation—over dinner, in the car, on the telephone—and children are inevitably going to pick up on these opinions and be influenced by them more than by any news report. As naturally inquisitive beings, they are going to ask questions.

In an election year, the fact that people don't always agree with one another becomes more pronounced than usual. Therefore, it is important to talk to your children about politics in an inclusive manner, so that they are better equipped to understand something that is usually considered an adult subject as well as better equipped to understand differences among people.

The most important thing to remember is that the way to talk to kids about politics is the same way you talk to them about any other subject: with understanding, patience and encouragement to ask questions. The degree to which your child will ask questions depends on how open the communication in the family already is. When you are watching the news together, let them know that it is okay for them to ask and have issues clarified. Of course, the age and temperament of the child will determine the types of questions asked.

Because children process information in different ways as they get older, the same questions may surface in different ways. As kids rethink things as they get older they may require more information and explanation.

Children in this age group are concrete thinkers. They do not always differentiate between what is real and what is fantasy. A concrete thinker watching television—with its quick edits, talking heads and vivid imagery—is especially susceptible to being confused or scared by political discussions. During the coverage of 9/11, for instance, when the news stations kept showing the disaster over and over, some young kids thought it was happening all over again. A good rule of thumb with this age group is not to tell them more than they want to know. Answer their concrete questions with short concrete answers.



[www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org](http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org)

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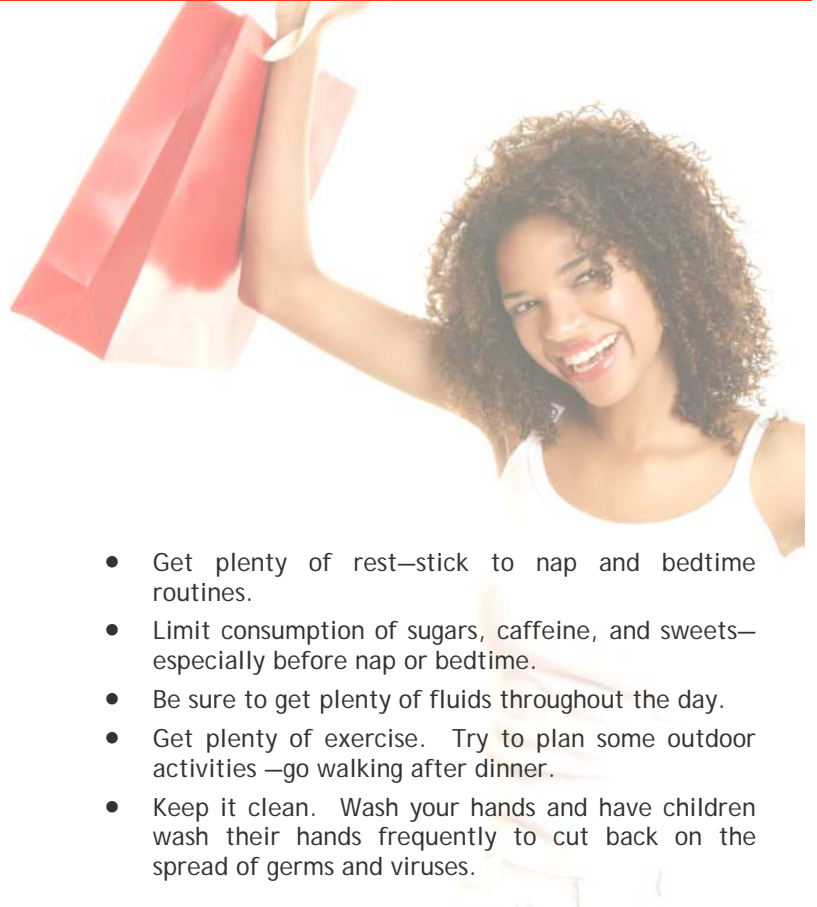
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## MAKE YOUR HOLIDAY MORE ENJOYABLE...

‘Tis the season of shopping, planning, and more events and family gatherings than you can possibly attend. Here are a few tips to help you and your family survive the hustle and bustle of the hectic holiday season:

- Don’t drag children with you for heavy-duty, all day shopping trips. Plan play dates for your children with grandparents or make arrangements with other couples who have children and trade out play dates with their children so they can shop too.
- Don’t forget the true meaning of the holidays. Plan quality family time and activities.
- Make preparing for the holidays a family event—even allow little ones to participate. It’s more important for a child to feel a part of this family holiday tradition than to have perfect decorations or the perfect meal.
- Make holiday plans manageable. Limit travel time. Plan to arrive back home with plenty of time to rest before the holiday break is over.
- Get plenty of fruits and vegetables. If the holiday meal is late or later than normal meal times, eat fruits and vegetables as a before-dinner snack. Eating healthy foods prior will help prevent overindulgence when the starchy, fatty foods and treats are finally served.



- Get plenty of rest—stick to nap and bedtime routines.
- Limit consumption of sugars, caffeine, and sweets—especially before nap or bedtime.
- Be sure to get plenty of fluids throughout the day.
- Get plenty of exercise. Try to plan some outdoor activities—go walking after dinner.
- Keep it clean. Wash your hands and have children wash their hands frequently to cut back on the spread of germs and viruses.