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Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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Tune Up Your Texting For Better Relationships and More Safety

Have you ever tripped or walked into something because you're texting? Have you had a text message misinterpreted so it creates bad feelings? You're not alone. These unintended consequences of texting happen all the time.

Texting is here to stay – and it has useful value as a communication tool. However, we need to do it appropriately so it doesn't damage our relationships, interfere with learning, or create the potential for physical injury.

Safety First

Reports of texting-related injuries are on the rise, and emergency room doctors say we need to be more cautious about when and

where we text.¹ Not only can we harm ourselves; we can injure others.

Texting, part of a growing phenomenon called multi-tasking, keeps us from paying close attention to what's going on around us, and our reaction times tend to be slower when we're texting. It seems easy to do more than one thing at once and to think that we're doing everything well, but the human brain isn't able to do several things at one time and give complete attention to all of them.² That's why we walk into walls and trip over sidewalks when we're texting.

Real Relationships

Many of us use texting

to communicate with our families and friends. If we're not careful, texting can change the way we relate to people around us.

When we text, we're likely to use shortcuts. This can lead to misinterpretations about the tone of the message and our feelings. Was she angry? Was he upset? Often it's difficult to tell. Humans have always communicated face-to-face, and we pick up lots of clues from personal interactions that are missing when we text.

It may seem easier to discuss difficult topics by sending a text message, but it can be perceived as a lack of sensitivity. The possibility of misinterpretation can

Tips for Texting

- Keep your phone where it's easy to find; for example, in the same pocket or same place in your purse.
- Turn off your phone when you're doing anything that requires full attention.
- If you need to text right away, stop what you're doing. Pull over if you're driving.
- If you're riding in a car where the driver is texting, ask him or her to stop.
- Avoid texting when:
 - Walking or jogging
 - Riding a bike
 - Skateboarding or skating
 - Using fitness equipment
 - Sitting alone at night when you may be at risk of a theft or assault

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make the conflict grow. It's better to talk in person or on the phone when complex situations are involved.

For teens or others using social networking sites such as FaceBook, juggling a large number of superficial, short-term, long-distance relationships may get in the way of having a few close, long-term relationships. It can keep a teen from spending time face-to-face with friends.

The Link between Multitasking and Learning

Sometimes we hear that multitasking, including texting, boosts efficiency. However, David E. Meyer, PhD, director of the Brain, Cognition and Action Lab at the University of Michigan, has found that people who multitask actually take longer to get things done, especially complex tasks, because they have to switch between the tasks,

and don't fully concentrate on any of them.³

Research also suggests that multitasking slows children's productivity and impairs their ability to learn.³ People whose attention is divided are more likely to memorize facts instead of truly understanding and being able to apply the information later.

Learning the best way to use texting isn't easy. But, you don't have to go it alone. UBH is here to

help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges (see Resources).



Talk with Your Kids about Texting

Did you know, that on average, teens send 455 text messages each month and receive 467 – that's more than 30 messages sent and received each day.⁴ Parents, on average, send 84 text messages each month and receive 96.⁴

Keeping in touch with your kids by texting can be useful and convenient. It's also important to set guidelines about when texting is appropriate and how to do it safely. Here are a few ideas:

1. Most important, be a good role model. Don't text when you should be focused on another activity, and never text while you're driving.
2. Establish and enforce family rules about

texting, as well as cell phone use overall – and stick to them. Be clear about when texting is not allowed. Also see the Tips for Texting in this article to get ideas for your family's rules.

3. Encourage social interactions. Urge your teen to play sports with neighborhood kids or do other outdoor activities; take a younger child to the zoo with a friend, or pack a picnic and go to the park.
4. Emphasize that there's a time and place for texting. When teens are in a texting "conversation" and feel compelled to read responses and answer

right away, it diverts their attention and prevents them from focusing. This is not optimal for study time or important family conversations.

5. Make a rule that your kids ignore texts (or turn off their phone altogether) while they're involved in anything that requires their full attention.
6. Encourage your kids to pick up the phone and talk to their friends instead of using texting as their main source of communication. Since text messages can be misunderstood, sometimes it's better to have a real conversation.

Resources

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

www.liveandworkwell.com

- Visit the "Relationship Resource" Life Stages Center for more information on healthy family relationships.

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1 Kids Health. http://kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?lic=62&article_set=62464. Accessed August 5, 2010.

2 Kids Health. http://kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?lic=62&dn=LiveAndWorkWell&article_set=62549&cat_id=20619#. Accessed August 5, 2010.

3 American Psychological Association. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/02/multitaskers.aspx>. Accessed August 5, 2010.

4 Cellular News. <http://www.cellular-news.com/story/30559.php>. Accessed August 5, 2010.