



Parents Need To Beware of “Almost” Relationships

Recently, articles in family magazines, woman’s magazines and newspapers are warning families of dangers relating to technology dependence. Virtual relationships, communication via the Internet and text messaging have become a concern for many parents.

Personally, the Internet and all the new technology at my fingertips, is a boon to me. When a question pops into my mind, even if it’s as remote as facts about the Dead Sea, instant access to the information is available on the web. This is exciting!

I can zip off a quick message to a friend, via my e-mail, and tell her the Dead Sea was formed 2.1 million years ago, is 8.6 times saltier than the ocean and is *hotter than Hades* in the summer..whether she cares or not. By the way...coming from personal experience, the dead sea region is hotter than Hades.

Several years ago, a cell phone was not a priority for me. Now I’m so dependent, if I leave home without it, driving back home to pick it up from the kitchen counter is a must.

Text messaging boggles my mind. I'm not well suited to that particular technology. My fingers don't move fast enough to make it worth my time. Besides, hearing a human voice on the other end of the line, is important to me.

It's exciting for me to keep up with a few of my grandchildren, via my daughter-in-law Martha's blog. My daughter, Katie's blog, keeps me informed about her photography business. Keeping up with a few other blogs keeps me up to date with friends.

I'm thrilled to have received an ipod for Christmas. Being an information buff, it's going to be fun downloading lectures via...yes...the Internet.

However, according to current reports, there is a downside to all of the gadgets and gizmos I love and have become accustomed to.

A word that keeps cropping up in my reading concerning cyberspace is, VIRTUAL. It means: ALMOST or SIMULATION of the real thing. Does that mean it's possible to have *almost* relationship with my friends, daughters, daughter-in-laws and grandkids via the Internet? The answer is "yes!"

For instance, YouTube is being bombarded with videos, from teens as well as adults, that range from violent to explicit sexual behavior; activities they would never participate in or share if they were in the same room with another person. It's easy to have an *almost* relationship with nearly a half a million YouTube visitors when you don't have to look them in the eye.

MySpace and other Community Forums are popular virtual forms of communication formats that can become a problem. Instead of making friends at school or work, a child or adult can hide behind his computer and create the *illusion* of instant a friendship and intimacy.

Two youngsters can sit in the same room and play video games, with more attention being paid to the animated friend on the screen than to each other. If they are not careful, they could deny themselves the opportunity of developing a true friendship. If too much time is spent with their hands on the paddles of a game, ignoring each other, they may find they end up with an "*almost*" relationship.

I've become aware of the amount of text messaging that infringes on the opportunity for building good communication and social skills. Four young girls sitting in a booth at a restaurant, all text messaging someone else, does not lend to creating face-to-face communication skills, let alone a bonded friendship.

For myself, I find that it's disconcerting to be in a conversation with a *friend* and have them keep looking at their phone for a *more important* communication. It makes me feel unimportant and it's just plain rude.

My granddaughter, McKenzie hosted a sleepover with a group of her friends. One girl spent breakfast "texting" other friends rather than participating in the conversation with the girls sitting around the table. McKenzie's mom, Emily, ask the young lady to put her phone away. I have a feeling she'll be the *friend* that won't be invited next time.

"Throwing the baby out with the bath water," would be unwise, because technology is a wondrous advancement and I plan to continue using it. But, I am going to take a serious look at *how* I use it.

Virtual relationship with my children, grandkids, family and friends is not acceptable to me. Along with an occasional

phone call, I want to be in their magnificent presence so our communication will bond our hearts as well as our thinking... into *real* relationships. Most of all, I want my personal relationship with them to be showered with lots of hugs and kisses and that would be a little hard via cyberspace.

Hmmmm. Just how do I begin this balancing act?

In summery: Parents need to be aware of how much time their kids are using cell phones, and the Internet. More importantly, they need to be aware of *how* their children are using this technology. Developing face-to-face social skills and one-on-one associations, are more important than any virtual or "almost" relationship they may develop on line or on their phones, no matter how bonded it feels.

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