

Device Indulgence and Family Connections:

How to keep “screen world” from undermining parent – teen relationships

by Jack Thaw, Ph.D.

Emotionally safe dialogue between parent and their teenagers has always been a challenge. Devices (and especially social media platforms) have complicated the matter. Psychologists have noted that the intrusions, seduction, and often dependence caused by 24 hour screen world distraction can impose a strain on all family relationships including marriages and parent – teen relationships. The price paid in many families is under – developed face – to – face, voice – to – voice, and eyeball – to – eyeball conversations from which valid and trusted relationships evolve.

Negotiating the messy demands of authentic connection and relationship with your teenage daughter or son cannot be accomplished in the “fast – thumb” text world of parenting by smart phones. As psychologist Martha Straus points out, thoughtful conversation can be terribly slow at times, and if devices are “on”, studies have shown that we are distracted by their mere presence in the room.

Straus calls this “distraction by screen” producing a “continuous partial attention” with our loved ones. Studies also show parents are as vulnerable to screen seduction as their children. The requirements for authentic, emotionally safe connections between parents and their teens cannot be achieved through a digital environment. Yet these authentic connections are critical to meeting the challenges of modern family life. For parents, they are equally critical to providing meaningful and trusted support and guidance to your teenage kids often adrift in the clammer, confusion, and pressure of their own social and academic worlds.

At Counseling Affiliates, we offer a broad range of services to teenagers, young adults, and their parents in response to these conditions, and also in response to the accelerating rates of anxiety and depression that often develop if these and related conditions go uncorrected. For example, the skills of creating emotionally safe conversations in families typically can be taught in a small number of sessions.

Contact us for more information.

