

GROWING UP

Face Time During Meal Time

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

A father and daughter go out to a restaurant for lunch. They sit down in a booth and both quietly slip out their cell phones and start texting and checking e-mail. This continues until the waitress comes to take their order. Another 20 minutes go by as silence envelops the table. It is not until the food comes that an actual face-to-face conversation starts between the two. However, even this is often interrupted by various tones that cause the father or daughter to stare down, twiddle their fingers, and then resume the conversation.

This situation plays out over and over again in restaurants with parents and their children. In an era where parents often struggle to balance work and family life, we often overlook some of the small opportunities to truly engage children and adolescents in face-to-face conversation. The lack of depth of conversation between children and adults is occurring despite being more connected than ever with our children through texting and social networks. This is unfortunate as it is in the depth of conversation where we convey our beliefs to our children and find out what issues our children are struggling to resolve.

I tried an experiment recently with my own children the last time we dined out. I resolved to not once get on my smart phone. This resolution was sorely tempted after I listened to the 15th potty-related joke. However, I was eventually rewarded by getting some insights into my daughters' thinking and what was going on in their lives. I would have missed that if I had gone immediately to my smart phone, which I have done frequently in the past.

Family time is becoming rarer with all of the media distractions available today. This is why meal time has become even more important as a time where face-to-face conversations can develop without family members being in a rush or distracted. A good rule to have during meal time is that no phone or text will be answered nor video game played while everyone is eating. For that matter, banning TV and other media is a good idea during meal time. This will allow at least 20 minutes per day for families to get up to date information on everything going on in each others' lives. This will bond families more closely and make them more resilient when life's challenges come their way. Putting it that way, the importance of that next text message doesn't seem quite as important as it did before.

Biography:

Dan Florell, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Eastern Kentucky University and has a private practice, MindPsi (www.mindpsi.net). Praveena Salins, M.D., is a pediatrician at Madison Pediatric Associates (www.madisonpeds.com).