

Age-old kids' query in a text message: Wuz4dina?

September 22 2009, By BETH J. HARPAZ , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Teens and texting is a subject that's often discussed in pathological terms. They're texting in class! They're sexting! They're running up \$5,000 bills! They need thumb therapy!

But [texting](#) isn't always bad. In some families, it's become a primary form of communication between parents and children. In fact, one of my favorite texts from kids is the earth-shattering query "Wuz4dina?"

Yes, the finest technology offered by the 21st century is being used to pose the question hungry children have been asking since cavemen roasted mammoth bones over a fire: "What's for dinner?"

Psychologist Thomas W. Phelan, author of "Surviving Your Adolescents: How to Manage and Let Go of Your 13-18 Year Olds," says one of the biggest problems with teens is getting them to communicate at all, so if they're willing to text their parents, we should embrace the trend.

"Instead of seeing the whole text thing as an enemy, see it as an ally," Phelan said. "I've had parents say to me, 'I can't talk to my son very well face to face.'"

But if the kid is willing to use texts as a medium, go for it. "My philosophy is, 'Stay in touch.' E-mail, cell phone or text - it makes no difference to me," Phelan said.

Debbie Heisler Bastacky, a librarian who works outside of Baltimore,

says her kids have a habit of texting her when they're standing right next to her.

"They text me when we're out visiting a place where they're bored and they want to go home," she said. "I'll get a text saying, 'Can we leave now?' or 'This is soooooo boring. Let's go home.' They don't just text me once. They text me every three minutes until they get a response."

Sometimes texts can even provide parents with peace of mind. [Teens](#) don't always check in or answer their cells, but they might just reply to your "R U OK?" text to show they safely reached their destination. Texts are also more discreet than phone calls, so kids can check in unobtrusively with parents without risking the ridicule of peers.

If cell reception is spotty or the teenager is in a noisy place like a party or concert, texting may be the best way to communicate. Leslie Palma-Simoncek of Holmdel, N.J., says that when her teenage sons see their favorite metal bands perform, she likes to get texts assuring her they haven't been swallowed up by the mosh pit.

But deciphering texts is not always easy for uncool old people, aka mom and dad. One of the first texts I got from my son a few years back seems obvious enough now, but at the time, I was befuddled. His message, seemingly sent out of the blue, consisted of one letter: "K."

K? What could that possibly mean?

A colleague asked if the text might be in response to something I'd asked my son to do. In fact, I had left him a cell phone message earlier that day reminding him about a school assignment. My colleague gently explained that "K" stood for "OK," as in, "I got your message, I will take care of it."

"It's too much trouble to type the O?" was all I could sputter in response.

Phelan says one reason texting may scare parents is that "the power and knowledge has been inverted." In other words, kids know more about this than we do.

"One way to strengthen your relationship is to let the kids show you how to do it," Phelan said. "Let them teach you."

If you care to try learning the lingo on your own, several Web sites will instantly translate undecipherable text messages. Scrolling through the text glossary offered by the mobile phone company LG at LGDTXTR.com was a revelation to me. I learned terms like "MOS" - "mom over shoulder" - and "MEH" - which is not an acronym but an expression of apathy, as in "who cares, whatev."

At www.lingo2word.com you can even have your old-school mom-speak translated into a cool [text message](#). "When are you going to clean your room" becomes "Wen RU gunA clean yr rm."

But I won't be sending that message any time soon, because I can already imagine the response: "MEH."

Beth J. Harpaz is the author of several books including "13 Is the New 18."

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