

No texting at dinner! Parenting in the digital era

October 1 2009, By KARYN D. COLLINS , For The Associated Press



Dylan Herina 13, uses his cell phone to text as his mother and father, Beth and Peter sit in another part of their family room in their home in Ringwood N.J., Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2009. Dylan has strict rules as to when and where he can text. (AP Photo/Rich Schultz)

(AP) -- Holly Kopczynski always prided herself on raising her kids the right way, teaching them etiquette basics like saying "please" and "thank you." Then it happened.

"We were at a restaurant for my mom's birthday. I looked over and there are my daughter and my oldest son [texting](#), holding their phones under the table," said the mom of four in Lewiston, Idaho. "I just came unglued. I was like, `Are you kidding? You're at your grandma's birthday party. Put those phones away now!'"

We all know teens love their gadgets - more for texting than talking. But the devices are posing some new challenges for parents. How can they teach their tech-savvy kids some electronic etiquette?

So far, parents are learning on the fly, imposing new rules for their young offenders such as "no texting at dinner."

Beth Herina of Ringwood, N.J., made that rule two years ago because her 13-year-old son was texting friends at the dinner table. She has another rule, too: No texting on family outings.

"He can text en route but not when it is family time," she said. "And I ask questions about who he is texting."

Her son Dylan may not like mom's rules, but she considers them mild. Her brother-in-law goes into his children's [cell phone](#) accounts to read their texts.

When it comes to [gadgets](#) like cell phones and computers, some kids and even some adults don't seem to consider their gadget behavior rude, said P.M. Forni, co-founder of Johns Hopkins University's Civility Initiative.

"We're seeing behavior that you never would have seen before," he said. "Students getting up in the middle of class to answer their phones, texting during class, students [watching TV](#) on their laptops during lectures."

Kopczynski said she told her 20-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter to shut their phones off and put them away, which they did, but it was their reaction to her order that still bothers her.

"That was a sad moment for me," she said. "I grew up with rules, the 'no elbows on the table' kind of things. And I've raised my kids with that.

But they didn't even realize what they were doing."

It's not only cell phones that parents are restricting.

Many are establishing control over their children's computer use - setting themselves up as administrators for Internet accounts, asking kids questions about who they are communicating with online, and at times looking directly over their shoulders at the screen.

Some even go so far as to put the computer in a common area of the house so they can monitor the sites their children are visiting.

Laura Lambert, a Chicago mom of four, tries not to implement time limits and other rules. Her 16-year-old son has his own laptop now after years of using the family computer.

"What I've found is if you say you only get 90 minutes, they obsess about it all day and they rush through everything else and it almost elevates the importance of it," she said.

"I find they regulate (their usage) better if I just say 'I want you to balance your time better so you can get everything else done.'" For kids, the rules and parent checks can seem intrusive and a bit extreme.

Kopczynski's daughter Kaitlyn had her phone taken away recently because she was texting after her mother told her to turn it off.

"I guess I understand why there are rules," Kaitlyn said. "But I don't think I'm that bad. I have a lot of friends who don't have rules at all."

Joy Weaver, whose Dallas-based Protocol Enterprises offers etiquette classes for all ages, said parents should begin establishing rules and expectations early on about cell phones and computer use. Monitor usage

closely with the help of available applications and programs, she said.

Sending a consistent message to children is also crucial.

"You can't have two sets of rules," she said. "If you don't want your children to text at the dinner table you need to ignore your own phone or excuse yourself from the table, too."

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Citation: No texting at dinner! Parenting in the digital era (2009, October 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-10-texting-dinner-parenting-digital-era.html>

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