

Teens' online friendships just as meaningful as face-to-face ones, study finds

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Many parents worry about how much time teenagers spend texting, sharing selfies and engaging in other online activities with their friends. However, according to a recent research synthesis from the University of California, Irvine, many of these digital behaviors serve the same purpose and encompass the same core qualities as face-to-face relationships.

"Increased peer interaction in cyberspace has led to growing concern that today's [adolescent](#) friendships are now less intimate and an inadequate substitute for those back in the day that took place in person," said Stephanie Reich, UCI associate professor of education and co-author of the study. "Many contacts between adolescents are mediated through technology and can provide additional opportunities for friends to spend time together, share thoughts and display affection than in offline spaces alone."

Reich, along with Ph.D. student and lead author Joanna Yau, identified six core characteristics of offline friendships – self-disclosure, validation, companionship, instrumental support, conflict and conflict resolution – and their digital parallels. For each quality, they noted ways in which online interfaces corresponded with or differed from in-person communication. The results are detailed in *Adolescent Research Review*.

Reich and Yau found that digital exchanges offer more benefits in some areas and carry increased risks in others. On the plus side, online contact enhances companionship between friends via conversations that can

continue throughout the day and night without disrupting others, and it also allows more time to control emotions and calm down before crafting and sending a response to something upsetting. Conversely, friendships can be damaged by gossip and rumors, which spread much faster and farther through cyberspace.

"Digital communication may increase the ramifications of conduct due to the permanence of information and the speed by which it travels, but at the core, [friendships](#) seem to have the same key characteristics," Reich said. "The majority of adolescents interact electronically most often with individuals they consider friends offline. So rather than reducing intimacy in these relationships, technology-mediated communication may provide additional benefits to teens as connections occur both face-to-face and online."

More information: Joanna C. Yau et al. Are the Qualities of Adolescents' Offline Friendships Present in Digital Interactions?, *Adolescent Research Review* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s40894-017-0059-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-017-0059-y)

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