



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

Disconnect to Reconnect

Recently I heard two young people joke about school. 'What's the best thing about school?' said one to the other, 'Learning to text with your phone in your pocket' replied his friend. On the bus into town the other day, I looked around at everyone on their ipods, mobile phones and blackberry's busily texting and updating their current status and location for all to see. Nearby two teenage girls were gossiping about who was dating who, arguing whether it was true or not as it was not on Facebook. Technology is such a huge part of our lives nowadays and for young people it is as if they are living two lives; their offline world and their private online world.

As I sat there, I started thinking about technology and all the devices we now use that make it easier to connect with people and I wondered whether technology does in fact bring us closer to the people in our lives or if it pushes us further away from the people we care about?

When you open the front door to an Irish family home nowadays, what you can often find are family members in different rooms Skyping, Texting, IMing or Gaming... no-one is talking to each other. Even when you do manage to sit down and have a conversation or a meal together, it is filled with TV's blaring, emailing and texting in their pockets, with little time for actual talking. It is no wonder that people are concerned about technology breaking down family communication as it takes up our attention and can be an individual pursuit.

However all is not lost, many of us remember a time when mealtimes, especially dinner time brought the whole family together to share their day's experience and stay involved in each other's lives. In today's fast-paced world, however mealtimes are often seen as insignificant or a luxury, families cannot afford, time wise. Yet research indicates that having meals together has a positive impact on family communications. It can be used as a time for teaching children and young people basic social skills for communicating, empathy and sharing family values, as well as staying connected and involved with each other.

When I speak to parents of teenagers about technology and the affects it has on the family and their relationships with their teenagers, many will speak of times when they have gone on family holidays, where the use of technologies have been limited or banned. During these times parents feel that their relationships with their teenagers improve as they spend the time talking and connecting with each other.

So even though technology has become a part of our daily existence, it is important to disconnect, even for one meal a day, so you can reconnect with family.

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