

# Common Sense Tips

## Texting

### Some facts

- > Texting is the #2 use of cellphones after checking the time
- > Kids send billions of texts every year and it's increasing
- > Text messages connect kids instantly and privately
- > Text messages and images can be spread virally or uploaded
- > Texting has a language of its own
- > "Sexting" happens: kids send inappropriate images or sexual messages
- > The incidence of cheating through texting is on the rise

### OMG, do u txt?

Texting is totally portable, private, and immediate. Kids can send messages to anyone from anywhere at anytime. In other words, they have no boundaries unless we help them to establish some. Almost no research has been done on the impact of immediate communication on our kids' social development. But the instant gratification factor of getting instantaneous responses from friends has to have some effect.

### What is texting?

Billions of text messages are sent every year from our kids' mobile phones. These SMS (simple message service) messages can be up to 160 characters and can contain images and video. Kids routinely use abbreviated language to communicate (ttyl means talk to you later, OMG stands for Oh, my God!, etc.). While most kids use messaging responsibly, it's still a powerful and extremely private communication tool that needs to be used responsibly.

### Why it matters

Any parent who has been at the dinner table or on a hike with a child only to have their pockets buzz with an incoming message knows that texts take your kids out of the moment they are in and connect them to distant friends. Texts can be used to keep friends close, help parents figure out family logistics, and offer a wonderful way to share experiences. But as with any powerful tool, texting can also be used to bully or humiliate people. An embarrassing or upsetting image or video can quickly be transmitted or uploaded to an online video sharing site like YouTube. Sexting is a form of texting where kids have to know that the abusing the privilege of texting will have consequences. And sadly, the use of texting in school cheating is on the rise as answers can be swiftly passed from student to student.

## Common Sense says:

- > **Carefully evaluate whether or not your kids need texting on their cellphones.** Just because other kids in their class have it doesn't mean your child needs it.
- > **If your kids do text, get an unlimited texting plan.** Otherwise the charges mount up swiftly.
- > **Make rules around when and where.** No texting during meals, during class, on family outings. Oh, and turn the phone OFF at night!
- > **Establish consequences for misuse.** Cheating, inappropriate messages, sexual communication. These are all no-go's. Want to make your point? Take a kid's phone away for a week.
- > **Watch your own behavior.** Parents are still kids' playbooks for right and wrong. If you text your kid during class and then turn around and tell that child that he or she can't do that, we send mixed messages.
- > **If you suspect your kids aren't texting appropriately, you can always look at their messages.** Yes, it feels like snooping, but our first job as parents is to ensure our kids use powerful technologies safely and responsibly.

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