



REMEMBER

- One of the ways children learn empathy is by watching the efforts of others to be empathetic toward them. Adults who have stopped making eye contact with their children must take the responsibility to reclaim face-to-face conversation because of what is at stake if we let it drift away.
- As adults, we need to admit that we too can find easy emotional gratification and neurochemical rewards that come through engaging with screens. We must fight being drawn to that above being drawn to the risk of face-to-face conversations. This is our problem too.
- Making space for solitude and stillness in our everyday lives has been proven to increase our ability to hear others. As we practice “face to face” conversation with Jesus, we are drawn toward looking into the eyes of his precious creations.



RECOGNIZE

- Over 60% of teens value texting over face to face conversation as their communication method of choice.
- Young people often feel uncomfortable with face-to-face conversation because it is unpredictable and takes so much effort – unlike texting. Face-to-face conversation feels vulnerable, slow paced and uncomfortable to them.
- Social media communication has some fairly predictable outcomes (i.e. post a good photo and expect “likes”), but time with people can not promise the same, and this generation finds safety in predictability.
- The eye contact found in face to face conversation is an essential element in the establishment of human connection as well as the development of empathetic understanding. Markers of empathy in young people have dropped by 40% in the last 20 years.
- We are not going to convince teens of the benefit of face-to-face conversations unless they push past the discomfort and experience it for themselves. We’re asking teens to trust us - and we need to acknowledge this and appreciate their courage if they follow us into face-to-face conversation.



RESPOND

- **Embrace the awkwardness** - Since texting feels like the safe and fulfilling way to communicate, initiating face-to-face conversation may feel like a disruption to other's lives. Do it anyway. Show them that they are important enough for you to willingly feel awkward as you step into their world.
- **Listen intently** – This communicates that the young person is valuable, interesting, and worth your attention.

- ▶ *Acknowledge the distractions to your listening and get rid of them.*
- ▶ *Ask good questions – Cultivate your curiosity and bounce off of what you’ve seen them communicate online or what you’ve noticed in person.*
- ▶ *Clarify and reflect back – Offer back what they’ve said in your own words without evaluation; check to be sure you’re accurately hearing what they mean.*

- **Communicate empathy** – Empathy validates our stories and makes us feel like we aren’t alone. It calms our fears that something is very wrong with us and says that the way we feel makes sense.
- **Affirm and encourage** – Affirm = sustain/uphold; encourage = bring courage. Often teens equate face-to-face conversation with correction or judgement. Look for ways to speak out the good things you are noticing - no matter how small.
- **Repeat.** Relationships deepen not because we said all the right things but because we showed up, looked the person in the eye, spoke out affirmation and made ourselves available to listen again and again.

In doing these things we are embodying the way our God cares for us. Our face-to-face conversations with youth can be the beginning of an invitation toward face-to-face conversations with our God.



RESOURCES

Book: **Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital World** by Sherry Turkle

www.teenagewhisperer.co.uk - Search “motivational interviewing” to use conversation as a tool to help teens consider change.