

Use of cell phones can help, hurt parent/teen relationship

Our daughter just entered high school and wants us to get her a cell phone. I realize that most high school students do have a cell phone now, but I'm concerned that it will cause more problems than it's worth. What are the pros and cons?

It's true that most teens do have a cell phone now. National surveys in 2008 and 2010 indicate that three-quarters or more have cell phones.

A study recently published in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* examined the communications dynamics between parents and teens related to cell phone use. Its findings offer some insight into how cell phone communication between parents and teens can hurt or help their relationship.

The study, "No Crossed Wires: Cell Phone Communication in Parent-Adolescent Relationships," surveyed nearly 200 families — one parent and one teen (ages 13 to 19) from each family. All involved in the survey had owned and used a cell phone for at least six months.

Researchers wondered if cell phones could actually facilitate communication between parents and teens, or if frequent calling from parents, for example, would be seen as intrusive.

The survey asked both parents and teens about the nature of their cell-phone communication with each other, and also



examined measures of self-esteem (of both parents and teens) and other dimensions of the relationship. Among its findings:

- Both parents and teens reported a closer relationship when teens tended to use the cell phone to ask parents for advice or other type of support.
- Parents also reported better relationships when the teen used the phone to check in, ask permission for something or a similar type of call.
- Both teens and parents reported greater conflict when parents tended to call their teens when upset or angry or to check their progress on schoolwork.
- Parents calling just to check in, to say "hi," or to talk when they're happy about something was linked with greater communication between parents and teens.
- Both parents and teens had lower self-esteem when parents called when they were upset or to track school work. Teens with higher self-esteem tended to use cell phones to get guidance from parents.

The bottom line? If you get your daughter a cell phone, make sure you don't use it solely to try to monitor her whereabouts and activities. That could backfire and damage your relationship. But when used appropriately, they can be a great tool for connecting and staying in touch.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to *Family Fundamentals*, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Kara Newby, family life program coordinator for Ohio State University Extension in Ohio State's College of Education and Human Ecology.

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