

WE DON'T TALK ANYMORE

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Do you remember the song sung by British pop star Cliff Richard that said, "It's so funny that we don't talk anymore?" It occurred to me that not only are we not literally talking to one another as we used to, but that we have also lost the art of writing whole sentences as well!

My husband has a lot to do with school testing. Most of the formal tests sent by the State are what I would describe as 'bubble tests' where the child fills in little ovals on a sheet. The questions are all true/false or multi-choice. A machine checks the answers just like the cards people fill out when entering numbers in the Power Ball lottery system. Everything has been made easy for grading purposes. Students don't seem to get taught to write whole stories any more, just sentences or brief paragraphs. He says that even some teachers cannot write correctly, so what sort of modeling do they provide?

My daughter told me this morning that her friends' Jason and Stephanie Face Book one another while sitting up in bed! It may sound silly, but it does indicate where communication is headed. I have heard of people who text one another in their homes because they can't be bothered getting up to speak face to face. Perhaps parents have resorted to texting their kids because they know the kids are constantly checking their mail – e.g. "Your dinner is ready!"

I mentioned above that most kids seem to have lost the art of writing whole sentences or stories, but the truth is, they are also losing the art of writing whole WORDS! Kids' text messages these days are mostly abbreviated words, so spelling is the next skill in jeopardy.

Our cousin has spent the last five years collecting handwritten letters that have been sent back and forth amongst family members. He has published several books of these precious communications and the families concerned are buying them willingly for historical purposes and to pass down through the generations. Guess what? This generation has stopped handwriting letters altogether and I'm finding myself doing this, too. The stark truth is being born out by the rationalization of the Post Offices around the world in an attempt to recover the annual losses. In the USA Saturday Post Office deliveries will cease in August, 2013. When did you last get a hand written-letter from a friend? Handwriting a letter takes time and that in itself, is very meaningful. The fact that someone took the time to sit down and talk to me on paper! I feel honored.

When your children bring their handwritten stories home from school or write, "I love you, Daddy!" on a piece of paper with a big heart on it, what do you do with it? Throw it away? Never! Why? That's because these messages are the simple, personal expression of a child's heartfelt feelings. Will you save these notes in a special file in your cabinet for years to come? You betcha!

Effective communication is passed between us through words, touch, a look, a smile, an inflection, a sound or a movement. Much of the meaning in what we say and do is completely lost when technology comes between us. Much of what we feel cannot be conveyed in a single word. We need to be able to express ourselves in meaningful sentences and through valuable face time. We are being robbed of shared expression – of laughing and crying together, of reaching out and holding one another, of sitting in companionable silence or just chatting about our experience, fun days, holidays – just anything. Do you remember the drawings of Huckleberry Finn sitting on the riverbank with his friend Tom Sawyer? I bet they were dreaming and scheming up all sorts of adventures. Texting is just not the same!

Our most valuable offering to our children is time! Take time to express yourselves face to face with them, and let them share their hearts with you. Create time together without iphones and ipads . Just you! Encourage your children to write letters to grandparents, and notes to their brothers and sisters. Get them to write stories about their holidays or some fictional adventure. Preserve the written word at all cost.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.