

Four people watched an online talk by Sherry Turkle about how technology is changing the way we communicate and gave us their opinions.

Preparation

Circle the correct definition of each word in CAPITALS. Look at the word in context to help you.

1. Parents message at the dinner table or use social media during the SCHOOL RUN.
 - a. driving children to school
 - b. children running in a race at school
 - c. children taking part in a school competition

2. It's as if we can't bear to miss out on what our online BUDDIES are up to ...
 - a. celebrities
 - b. friends
 - c. enemies

3. ... so we JUGGLE the real and online world.
 - a. ignore
 - b. improve
 - c. do several things at once

4. The speaker made a VALID point.
 - a. interesting
 - b. difficult to disagree with
 - c. complicated and contradictory

5. Parents post on social media while cooking dinner or waiting at a RED LIGHT.
 - a. traffic light
 - b. street light
 - c. zebra crossing

6. I don't think addiction to social media is such an ISSUE for my generation.
 - a. connection
 - b. expression
 - c. problem

7. We send tiny SNIPPETS of conversation or emoticons to each other when texting.
 - a. big pieces
 - b. small pieces
 - c. insults, rude words

8. This superficial conversation is replacing IN-DEPTH face-to-face interaction.
 - a. never-ending
 - b. superficial
 - c. deep and detailed



Are we losing the art of conversation?

We asked four people who watched an online talk on technology and communication by Sherry Turkle for their opinions.

A The talk certainly gave me plenty of food for thought about the way we communicate these days and how technology is changing our behaviour. People are constantly multitasking, whether it be emailing during meetings or texting in the checkout queue. I really believe it's affecting the way we relate to each other and it's not just in the workplace. Kids fade into the background as parents message at the dinner table or post on social networks during the school run. It's as if we can't bear to miss out on what our online buddies are up to, so we juggle the real and online world. My greatest concern is that we don't give our brains a chance to switch off. It's these precious moments when we actually process information that helps us make important decisions.

It was a fascinating talk and the speaker really hit the nail on the head with a couple of things. Take parental influence, for instance. How can we expect teenagers not to text while doing their homework when they witness their parents posting on social media while cooking the evening meal or waiting at a red light? She also made a valid point about people wanting to be in two or several places at once. So they switch back and forth between their real-life and online conversations. I see it all the time with my teenage daughter and her friends. They arrange to meet and then sit together in silence while each one engages in a different conversation online. **B**

C So much of what the speaker said rang true. I honestly believe there's a danger that the more connected we are, the more isolated we feel. I don't think this is such an issue for my generation who've lived without technology for so long. We know how to be alone and, more importantly, we know that it's OK to be alone. But the under 20s are another kettle of fish. They're so busy communicating that they never experience the feeling of solitude and run the risk of not learning how to enjoy their own company. In addition, they're learning conversation through messages that can be edited and changed at the expense of learning the art of real conversation in real time with the person in front of you.

I'm not sure to what extent I agree that people are more alone, but the way we communicate has certainly evolved. We send tiny snippets of conversation or emoticons to each other and I wonder how much this actually allows us to really understand one another. This superficial conversation is replacing in-depth face-to-face interaction with its pauses, intonation and sentiment. The speaker makes a good point about how we're getting used to conversing with machines like Siri or robots, which are totally devoid of any experience of human life. But despite such limitations, we seem to be expecting more from technology and less from each other. **D**

1. Check your understanding: gap fill

Which person, A, B, C or D ...

1. shares A's view that we simultaneously spend our time in different worlds? _____
2. has a similar opinion to C about the importance of conversational skills without technology?

3. gives an example of how people can be simultaneously together and alone? _____
4. agrees with B that online communication is having an impact on family relationships?

5. disagrees with C about people feeling more isolated? _____
6. mentions how decision-making skills could be affected by technology? _____
7. shares D's opinion that the nature of conversation has changed? _____
8. agrees with A that times without any communication are valuable? _____

2. Check your vocabulary: matching

Complete the sentences to match the expressions from the text with their meanings. Write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

- | | | | |
|--------|---|----|--|
| 1..... | If something gives you food for thought, ... | a. | they say exactly how something is. |
| 2..... | If someone fades into the background, ... | b. | it seems to be true. |
| 3..... | If someone hits the nail on the head, ... | c. | they are less important than before. |
| 4..... | If you switch back and forth, ... | d. | the first thing harms the second thing. |
| 5..... | If something rings true, ... | e. | it's completely different from something else. |
| 6..... | If something is another kettle of fish, ... | f. | you change between two ideas. |
| 7..... | If you do something at the expense of something else, ... | g. | it doesn't have something that you would normally expect it to have. |
| 8..... | If something is devoid of something, ... | h. | it makes you think. |

Discussion

What changes in the way we communicate with technology do you think are most important? Why? Do you prefer to communicate face-to-face or online? Why?