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Debate

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📍 Lonely Town, U.S.A.



♥ 50 billion

Is Technology Killing Our Friendships?

💬 Thanks to social media, human beings are more connected to one another than ever. So why are experts worried that we're actually more alone?

#solonely 😞 #myphoneismybff 😍

BY LAUREN TARSHIS



GETTY IMAGES (INSTAGRAM LAYOUT); PUSH PICTURES/SOMOS IMAGES/CORBIS (TEENS); SHUTTERSTOCK (EMOJIS); VIA INSTAGRAM (INSTAGRAM LOGO)

Thirteen-year-old Kaylee has a lot of friends—532, actually, if you count up both her Instagram followers and Facebook friends. And she spends a *lot* of time with them. On a typical weekend, she might FaceTime with her three best friends, tag her pals from the soccer team in Instagram videos, and Snapchat her friends from camp.

“In one day, I can connect with 50 different people,” she says happily.

But is it possible that Kaylee’s online friendships could be making her lonely? That’s what some experts believe. Connecting online is a great way to stay in touch, they say. However, experts worry that many kids

are so busy connecting online that they might be missing out on genuine friendships.

Could this be true?

1 in 4

TEENS ARE ONLINE ALMOST CONSTANTLY



are so busy connecting online that they might be missing out on genuine friendships. Usually, connecting with friends usually meant spending time with them in the flesh. Kids played Scrabble around a table, not Words With Friends on their phones. When friends missed each other, they picked up the telephone. Friends might even write each other letters—pages long—and send them in the mail.

Today, most communication takes place online. A typical teen sends 2,000 texts a month and spends more than 44 hours per week in front of a screen. Much of this time is spent on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

These platforms help people stay connected like never before. You can keep up with your friend who

Connecting With Friends

During your parents’ childhoods—back when smartphones were just props in science-fiction movies—connecting with friends usually meant spending time

76% OF TEENS USE SOCIAL MEDIA

OF THESE...

71

PERCENT USE

FACEBOOK



52

PERCENT USE

INSTAGRAM



41

PERCENT USE

SNAPCHAT



moved to Texas or send a good-luck text to your brother before his soccer game. You can watch your baby cousin grow up via Instagram and stay up-to-date on hundreds of people at once.

In fact, in many ways, online communication can make friendships stronger. “There’s definitely a positive impact. Kids can stay in constant contact, which means they can share more of their feelings with each other,” says Katie Davis, co-author of *The App Generation*.

Alone Together

Other experts, however, warn that too much online communication can get in the way of forming deep friendships. The biggest problem is the amount of time kids are spending alone with their devices.

“If we are constantly checking

150 average number of followers a teenager has on Instagram



in with our virtual worlds, this leaves little time for our real-world relationships,” says Larry Rosen, a professor of psychology at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Often, even when kids are together, they are interacting with their phones instead of with each other.

Rosen also worries that some kids might mistake the “friends” on their social media feeds for true friends. In tough times, you don’t need someone to like your picture or share

94
PERCENT
OF TEENS
WHO HAVE
A SMART-
PHONE USE
IT DAILY

your tweet. You need someone who will keep your secrets and hold your hand.

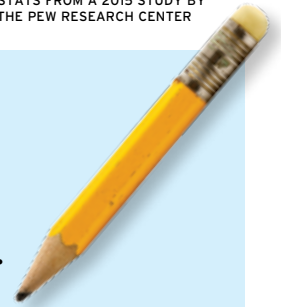
Kaylee understands that building true friendships requires spending time together—and not just online.

For her last birthday, she went camping in the woods with a few of her friends. There was no Wi-Fi or cell service.

“We panicked at first,” she says. “But then it was okay. We just talked all night.” ●



ALL STATS FROM A 2015 STUDY BY THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Is Technology Killing Our Friendships?

Identify evidence from the article that supports each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.

YES

We’re replacing friends with screens.

- 1 We don't spend enough time together in person.
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

NO

Technology brings us closer together.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS—and decide what you think. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay.

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