

# The ABCs of texting, rules for Mom and Dad

When it comes to a child's cell phone use, parents need to 'Acknowledge, Beware and Care'

## ADVANCE FEATURE SERVICES

Jacquie Ream has had enough.

Between the proliferation of cyberbullying that has been dominating the headlines and the inappropriate communications that cell phones enable between teens, she believes it's time for parents to set up new rules for their teens regarding the technology that has become an intractable part of their lives.

"The common joke with teens is that they're all developing oversized thumbs from all the texting they do on their cell phones," said Ream, a former educator and author of "YNK — You Never Know" (reamkink.com), a book about the pitfalls of technology aimed at today's teens.

"The truth is that technology has moved faster than parents' ability to keep up with it. Only five years ago, it was not terribly common for teens to have their own cell phones. Today, most kids use them, and the only rules they get from their parents concern not texting over their cell plan's limits.

"Kids need more," she went on. "Parents need to be able to explain to them the

complexities of how this technology can affect their lives, and how to prevent the negative phenomenon of cyberbullying and more."

Ream thinks it's time to get back to basics with regard to teens and cell phones. As a result, she has written a new set of rules — a new ABCs — for parents of teens with cell phones:

**A is for Acknowledge.** Parents need to acknowledge and accept that technology is here to stay, and it will likely move faster than they can keep up with it. In the science fiction of the '70s and '80s, we all marveled at the videophone, which was a staple of the medium, thinking we'd never live long enough to see it.

Today, the Apple iPhone has a videophone function that not only makes it real, but allows us to hold it in the palm of our hand and take it anywhere we go.

In context, that should be unbelievable, but it's proliferated so quickly, we haven't had the time to take a moment to respond. We need to stop and try to calculate the ramifications of having that technology, and it goes beyond worrying about making sure our hair looks neat before we answer the phone.

**B is for Beware.** When we were kids, bullying was restricted to the school yard, and when we were home or with our friends, we were safe from it.

Today, cell phones enable bullying 24/7, and the impli-

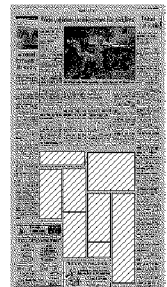
cations are far-reaching. Cyberbullying has been blamed in the suicide deaths of teenagers all over the country, so parents need to provide proper guidance for their kids so that they don't wind up as either the bully or the bullied.

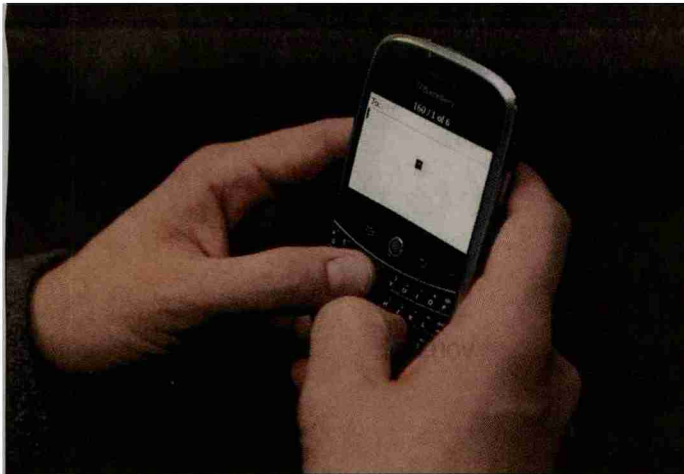
**C is for Care.** Kids need to be taught to place a higher value on their friendships and acquaintances. Internet sites like Facebook have taught kids that making a friend is as easy as clicking "yes" to accept a friend request, and that ending a friendship is even easier — just click on "block," and that person's out of your life.

If the technology that is a part of their daily lives is teaching them that's all there is to true friendship, then parents need to step up through guidance and example to show them that technology should not be the tail that wags the dog of our lives. We should use that technology to represent our values, and not allow the technology to determine what they are.

"Parents need to take an active role in preventing bullying from becoming a part of their children's lives," Ream added. "We cannot sit back and blame technology for the crisis facing our kids today. Technology is a tool. There is a human hand and a human mind behind every vicious text message and every texted threat.

"We need to bring our children a sense of basic core values about their relationships so that they don't fall down the slippery slope that cell phones and the Internet is paving for them," she concluded.





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**Not long ago, it wasn't terribly common for teens to own a cell phone. Now the majority do, a reality parents need to embrace and address.**