In today’s age of innovation and technology we can talk to family, friends and strangers around the world with a touch of a texting button. But does all this amazing means of connecting lend itself to better communications within relationships? The answer might surprise you.

Two of the components for a strong family are spending time together and showing appreciation to other family members. Family members can spend enormous amount of time communicating using technology but miss the face to face, quality time that is needed to build a foundation of appreciation and interaction with other family members.

A perfect place to develop connections and relay love and appreciation is the family dinner table. Somewhere along the road of the modern family we have become too busy and distracted by the availability of new technology that we have abandoned the family together time. And no, eating together in front of the TV on TV tables is not conducive to building strong family relationships.

Eating dinner together has been shown to be very beneficial to teenagers and to family relationships all around. Columbia University did a recent study that found teens who eat dinner with the family at least 5 times a week are more likely to get better grades and are less likely to be involved in substance abuse and less likely to be sexually active at an early age. Even with all the good research results, 42% of American families do not sit down to eat together for at least 5 meals a week. At least 5 meals a week seems to be the magic number for staying connected.

Since it is the connection between family members that is important, it stands to reason that anything that interrupts communication can cause disconnect between children and parents. TV, games, texting, all these things can take up time that could be spent in talking to family members. What is interesting is that research is finding that young parent’s texting and being on face book has caused a problem with kids wanting their parent’s attention. For many years it has been the television and/or the telephone that has caused communication problems in the family and they are still one of the main trouble makers to relationships (marital and parental interactions) but now there are many more exciting technologies to keep us together in the same area but isolated at the same time.

The Kaiser Foundation found in 2010 that children 8-18 watched an average of 56 hours per week or 8 hours a day. Nielsen Company (2009) found that children 2-5 watch more than 32 hours of TV each week. Children who watch more TV have lower grades in school, read fewer books, exercise less and tend to be more overweight.

Let me offer one solution. Do you have fond childhood memories of playing board games with family and friends? Board and card games provide opportunities for families to come together, create memories and spend inexpensive quality time; while having fun.
Playing games stimulates mind and body, builds relationship bonds between all generations, fosters imagination and supports all stages of child development – not to mention family communication. Research has shown that play promotes cognitive development, language, motor and social skills and allows children to express and explore feelings, thoughts and experiences. When the whole family is involved, fun and laughter is more likely to motivate children to work together, communicate and accomplish goals. Children also learn reasoning and sportsmanship skills, develop creativity and enhance number and word recognition.

So the next time you are tempted to plop down in front of the TV, text your boss about tomorrow’s work or check in with your friends on face book, turn off the TV, disconnect the video games and computers, turn off your phone and gather around the kitchen table with your family to create life long memories.

References:
Dr. Stevanne Auerbach
Generations United – Play is Forever