**Technology and Friendships**

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 Snapshot 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? Thant’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.

**1 in 4** Teens are online almost constantly

Could this be true?

During your parents’ childhoods – back when smartphones were joust props in science-fiction movies – 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 teenager 2,000 texts a month and spends more than 44 hours per week in front of a screen. Much of the 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 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.

**76% of Teens use social media**

**Of these…**

71% 52% 41%

Use Use Use

Facebook Instagram Snapchat

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*.

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.

**150** average number of followers a teenager has on Instagram

“If we are constantly checking 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 your tweet. You need someone who will keep your secrets and hold your hand.

**94 %** of teens who have a smartphone use it daily

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.”