Beyond texting

As children and teens return to school after the holiday break, now is the time to evaluate your family's ability to communicate.

Here are some tips for healthy communication:

••• Try to be a good witness of safe and healthy technology use with words and actions. Put down your phone when talking with your children, never text and drive (locking phones in the glove compartment helps) and do not bring any technology to the table for mealtimes.

••• Remember to communicate about the positive and everyday life. Sometimes, when things get busy, parents find that they are only really talking with their children when a big issue (usually a negative one) arises. This can lead to the child or teen associating talks with parents to being in trouble. Remember to take time to point out the good things you are seeing, and ask about things that interest your child.

••• Make good use of the time you do have together. One often-overlooked time families have together is "car time."

••• Use open-ended conversation starters, such as, "Tell me about something you are working on at school right now" or, "What is one dream you have for the future?"

••• When you need to ask a question that may make your child defensive, try asking by "wondering out loud" – for example, "I'm noticing that lately your chores aren't getting done, and I'm wondering why that's happening."

••• As often as possible make time for regular family meals, which research has shown to be associated with higher grades, higher self-esteem, lower incidences of depression and suicide, low rates of substance abuse, as well as many other

positive outcomes.

••• Pray together. When your family is close to God, you are also more connected with one another, even at those times when you can’t be together.

3 Ways to Help Your Child Communicate with Peers

As communication becomes more instant through e-mail, texting and messaging through social-networking sites, there is a risk of more shallow – and impulsive – conversation between kids. Here are a few tips for helping your child avoid sending “mixed signals.”

1. If your child is upset at a peer, encourage him or her to avoid texting (where messages are necessarily much shorter) and to have an in-person conversation.
2. Offer yourself as a sounding board. If your child plans to talk in person or over the phone about an important issue, say, “Would you like to go through it with me, so you can make sure you say it just the way you want to?”
3. Encourage your child to read through any e-mail, text messages or social-networking messages before sending them. A good general policy is to avoid saying something online that one would not feel comfortable saying in person.