Talking Without Speaking: The Role of Texting in Relationships

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 8

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Laptop or desktop computer with PowerPoint on it
- Worksheet: "Beth and Sam" – enough copies for half the class
- Homework: "Let Me Think About It" – one per student
- White board and markers (at least one marker should be red, and one should be green, if possible)
- LCD projector and screen
- Powerpoint: "Talking by Texting"

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Name at least one thing they do and don't like about communicating via text. [Knowledge]
2. Identify at least two ways in which people can miscommunicate via text and the impact these miscommunications can have on their relationship with another person. [Knowledge]
3. Explain at least one way of texting clearly and respectfully with another person in an effort to avoid misunderstandings. [Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Say, "Today we are going to be talking about the types of social media you all tend to use, and what you do and don't like about them. What are you currently using?" Record the list on the board. Examples might include:

- Instagram ☐
- Vine ☐
- Facebook ☐
- Snapchat ☐
- YouTube ☐
- Tumblr ☐
- Twitter ☐

Once you have a list brainstormed ask, "What are the things you like about these? What don't you like about them?" With the green marker, record what they say they like, and use the red marker to record what they say they don't like.

Ask, “How many of you have ever messaged with someone, either using a phone for texting or some other app?” After a few hands have been raised ask, “Have you ever misunderstood what someone meant when they messaged you – or had someone misunderstood what you meant?” After a few responses say, “It’s really common for this to happen. Let’s take a look at why that might be, and what we can do about it.” (8 minutes)

STEP 2: Start the PowerPoint, “Talking by Texting.” Say, “Sometimes we don’t know what a person means because there’s no feeling behind the text. Or, people use shorthand – they think they’re being super clear, but we’re not sure what they mean, and vice versa. Let’s take a look at a few examples.”

Go to slide #2, and go through each example one at a time. Use the following as a guide:

Example One: Someone writing “Thx” vs. “Thanks” can sometimes communicate flirting – or just affection if it’s done between friends or family members. In other cases, it’s just a quick short-hand, and have no meaning behind it.

Point out that person one said “I enjoyed hanging with you yesterday” but person two did not say, “Me, too.” Ask students whether they noticed that, and what they think. If they were Person One, how could they follow up to see whether Person Two enjoyed hanging out with them?

Example Two: Ask the students what they think Person Two is saying in their response, as well as how Person One might interpret that answer. Ask them to share what they think Person Two could have done differently.

Example Three: Ask students about Person Two’s response. Explain that with punctuation in texts, the number used communicates different things. One question mark would have communicated confusion – three can communicate “I’m annoyed with you.” Ask what Person Two could have said to be clearer.

Example Four: Ask students what the symbol on the slide means, probing for “I’m texting you back.” Talk about how it feels to be waiting for a response – or how it feels to see those, have them disappear, and then reappear. This communicates that the person is writing and re-writing their response. In other cases, people aren’t planning to respond, but hit a random letter, and so the dots will remain there until they delete the random letter. This can be really confusing to and raise anxiety for Person Two, depending on what they’re discussing.

Example Five: Ask, “What are some reasons why a person may not text another person back?” Probe for:

- They may not feel like talking/not like you ☐
- Somebody may have come up to them ☐
- They might have gotten another text from someone else ☐
- They might have gotten distracted ☐

Say, “Has anyone ever been ignored by another person? What does that tend to feel like?” After a few responses, go to the next slide and say, “Not responding at all to a text is like

ignoring someone. And even though you may have a reason for not responding, the other person doesn't necessarily know that. Go to Slide #5 and say, "Emojis can help – as you know, this represents only a small number of what's out there! The only problem is—" go to slide 6—"even Emojis can't communicate everything you're trying to communicate sometimes. Say Person One asks Person Two to hang out – A thumbs up is pretty clear that Person Two is up for it; what could the second Emoji communicate? How about the last two?" If it's not mentioned, talk about how the fourth Emoji can be used to communicate an expectation of doing something sexual. (13 minutes).

STEP 3: Ask whether they know of anyone who had a fight with a friend or boyfriend or girlfriend via text or other messaging. Ask for examples of what the fight was about. Pull out themes, probing for issues relating to what was said and how it was said – as well as how each person responded.

Say, "Talking by text is really similar to talking in person or talking over the phone or by Skype – but there are some real differences. Let's figure out how we can text in ways that are clear – and don't put us into awkward or even unsafe situations."

Divide the class into pairs. Hand out the Beth and Sam Worksheet and ask for individual volunteers to read the first three paragraphs aloud. Tell pairs they will have about 10 minutes to read the text dialogue and answer the questions on page 2 together. (12 minutes)

STEP 4: After about 10 minutes, process in the larger group by going through the questions on the worksheet. Make sure to make the following points:

- Just like with in-person conversations, people can misunderstand or miscommunicate via text. ☐
- The main difference between a difficult conversation or disagreement via text rather than having it in person is that a person can put down their phone and not respond, which can feel hurtful and disrespectful to the other person. ☐
- Texts that you thought were fine to send but were misconstrued by another person can be forwarded on to other people, which can blow the situation out of proportion and make a private disagreement public. ☐ (15 minutes)

STEP 5: Distribute the homework sheet, which asks them about their own use of cell phones to communicate with others, and ask them to return it during the next class session. (2 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The first learning objective will be accomplished during the whole-class brainstorm activity. The second learning objective will be addressed during the short PowerPoint presentation and discussion, and reinforced by the paired worksheet activity, the latter of which will also fulfill the third learning objective.

HOMEWORK:

Students will complete a self-assessment of their own cell phone use with a specific focus on communicating via text.

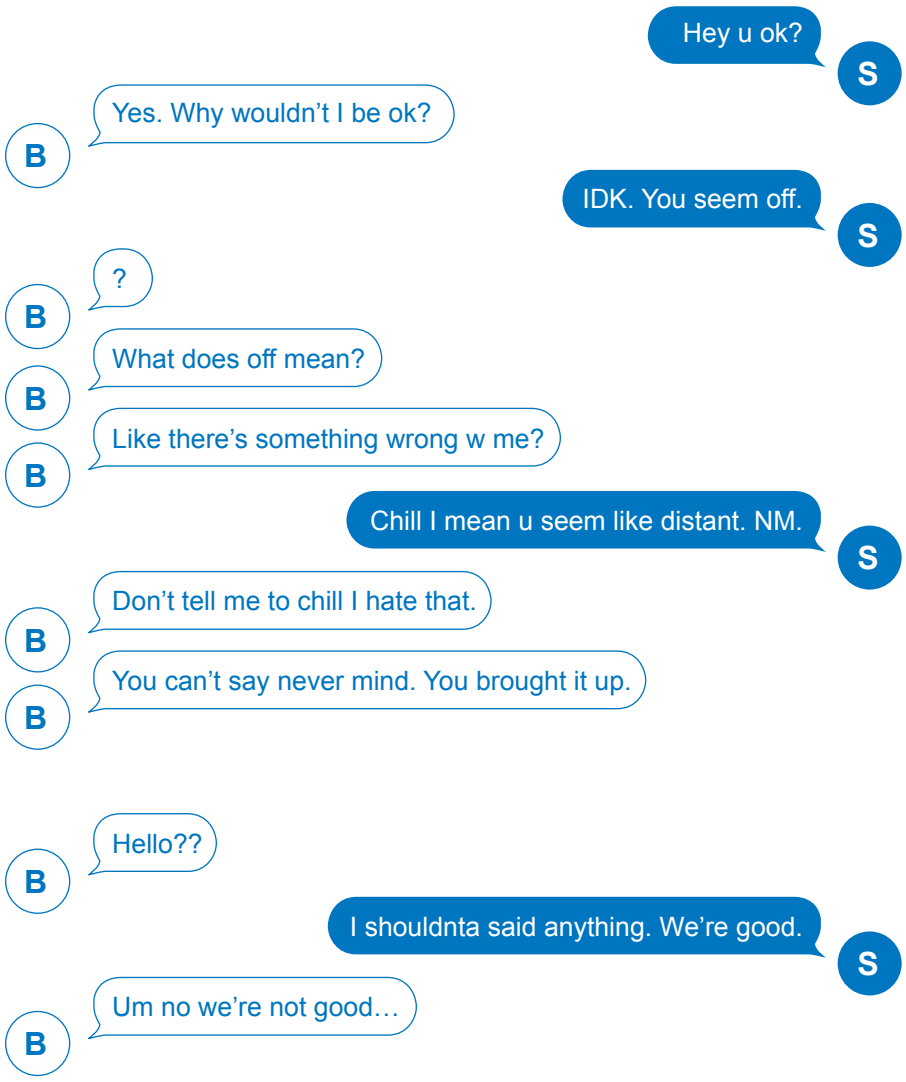
Beth and Sam

Beth and Sam have been going to the same schools since Kindergarten. They only knew each other to say hi, but never really spent time together. When they got into middle school, things started to change – they started looking for each other in the hallways and then looking away and smiling. They also started asking other friends about each other. Finally, near the end of 8th grade, Sam got Beth's number and texted her: "Hey."

Beth responded with, "Hey you ;)" and Sam said, "sup?" and the texting went on from there. About a half an hour later, Sam asked Beth if she wanted to hang out after school the next day, and she said she did. Within a few days, they were officially a couple.

Sam and Beth spent a lot of time together. They also texted a lot – even just quick texts like, "hey boo" and "love u." About a month into the relationship, Sam noticed those quick texts weren't coming as often. He wants to talk with Beth about it but isn't sure how.

Here's what he tried:



Names: _____ _____

QUESTIONS:

1. What happened here? _____

   _____

   _____

2. What made it go from being a friendly text to an argument? _____

   _____

   _____

3. Why do you think Beth responded to Sam's text as she did?_____

   _____

   _____

4. How did Sam's response to Beth make things worse, not better?_____

   _____

   _____

5. Now that this has happened, what do you think Sam should do next? What do you think Beth should do next? _____

   _____

   _____

Let Me Think About It:
How I Use Technology to Communicate

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Instructions: Fill out the following survey about how YOU use technology to communicate with others in your life.

1) Do you own a cell phone? Yes No

If yes, at what age did you get your cell phone?_____

If no, why not?_____

2) What do you use your cell phone for? (Check all that apply):

Talking to friends/a boyfriend or girlfriend _____

Texting with friends/a boyfriend or girlfriend _____

Taking and sharing photos on SnapChat, Instagram or other social media? _____

On social media sites like Facebook or YouTube? _____

Playing games? _____

5) What do you like about being able to text with friends/a boyfriend or girlfriend?

6) What do you NOT like about texting with friends/a boyfriend or girlfriend?

7) How do you think your life would be different if you didn't have technology to communicate with other people?

(Adapted from Where Do You Draw Your Digital Line? http://www.expectrespectaustin.org/uploads/general/pdf/that's%20not%20cool%20lesson%20plans%20for%20teachers.rev.pdf)