

December 2014

*The Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution Newsletter  
State of Hawaii, Judiciary*



Center for Alternative  
Dispute Resolution  
Hawaii State Judiciary  
417 South King Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Phone:  
808-539-4ADR (4237)

Fax:  
808-539-4416

E-mail:  
CADR@courts.hawaii.gov

Website:  
[www.courts.state.hi.us/cadr](http://www.courts.state.hi.us/cadr)

## *Preserving the Art of Conversation*



Human interaction has changed. In the not so distant past, children created games and stories, face to face, usually without adult supervision. They learned creativity, cooperation, self-regulation, and social skills as they made and enforced their own rules, and they carried those skills into adulthood. Now children interact with a device using a program that has clear goals and rules, and they participate on structured teams in established sports with adult referees who regulate play. They have less practice cooperating with others to make and enforce rules. Massachusetts Institute of Technology psychologist Sherry Turkle credits interpretation of complex nonverbal cues with teaching children to think, reason, and develop compassion. Without practice in face to face exchanges, skill development does not occur.<sup>1</sup> Less practice in childhood has an impact in later life.

Adults cooperate in conversation with verbal turn taking, a socially learned skill in which speaking transitions from one person to another. While one person speaks, the other anticipates when that verbal turn will end and prepares to continue without a long gap. We've become so practiced at turn taking that if someone takes too long to answer a request for favor, we assume they are not willing to help. Technology has impacted adult's conversational practice just as it has children's play. Mobile devices provide entertainment and access to others at a distance but often listening is not a part of the interaction as we send texts and e-mails. Practice at negotiating the rules of a conversation - the topic, turn lengths, and when to stop - is declining.

So what happens when we are required to listen and respond to another in a mediation, negotiation, or other conversations structured towards an outcome? Less practice often results in less skill and comfort at producing and interpreting messages, and less success in situations requiring these skills. Integrating technology with conversational practice can enhance skill in both methods. When face to face exchanges aren't possible, use of Face Time, iChat or Skype allows parties to see one another and observe and interpret nonverbal cues. Recent research found that tweens followed up texts with plans to talk or meet in person.<sup>2</sup> Co-workers can send texts and e-mail to schedule real time meetings with colleagues to exchange ideas and make decisions with devices on hand for research and fact checking. Face to face exchanges sharpen listening and observational skills, help us learn about others, and increase our skill and comfort at interpreting nonverbal cues.

<sup>1</sup> [Jeffrey Kluger, \*We never talk any more: The problem with text messaging\*, CNN.com, September 6, 2012](http://jeffreykluger.com/2012/09/06/we-never-talk-any-more-the-problem-with-text-messaging/), last accessed October 30, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> [Robin Mejia, \*How texting changes the way kids communicate\*, parenting.com](http://parenting.com/2014/11/06/how-texting-changes-the-way-kids-communicate/), last accessed November 6, 2014