



## Let's Talk About Sex (Digitally): Face to Face vs. Using a Buffer

(Watch [Face to Face vs. Using a Buffer video](#). Closed Captioning available)

### Video Transcript

We often think that direct, face-to-face communication is the “best” form of communication—the method we should be striving for. But for youth and adults alike, we often opt for less direct communication: phone calls, texts, email, and the like. Why?

The decision to communicate face-to-face or more indirectly may well have to do with my concern about how my communication partner sees me.

I'm likely hoping to make a positive impression, not a negative one. And that affects my preference for HOW we communicate.

When do people most want face-to-face communication? When they expect the conversation to make them look good!

What about the other way around? When do people most prefer to communicate more indirectly, using technology? People are more likely to prefer tech for communication that is potentially embarrassing and may affect how people perceive them.

We know of two main reasons that people choose technology if they find a conversation potentially embarrassing.

First, tech provides fewer visual cues than face-to-face communication. Even if you are using video, subtle changes in facial expressions may not be detected, and they are invisible in a text message exchange.

Second, in the case of texting and email, there can be a useful pause between receiving the message and responding to it. Even though we often expect an immediate response when we send a text message, we don't always get one. The other person may be unable to respond right away, or they might delay a response in order to craft the message carefully – and on the other end of that text exchange, we don't know which it is.

Parents can use these features to their benefit!

When your teen sends you a message you weren't expecting or don't know the answer to, you can take your time to frame your message or response. Use this time to craft a message that is supportive, nonjudgmental, or gently curious. You do not have to worry that your facial expression is giving away your true feelings! Make sure your teen knows you are open to them sending you questions this way – it might be less embarrassing for them to send a question in a text rather than asking it face to face.

## Reference

O'Sullivan, P. (2000). What you don't know won't hurt me: Impression management functions of communication channels in relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 26.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/26.3.403>