

Stop Phubbing and Start Listening

Dennis Hinkamp

04/24/2026

```
$(document).ready(function(){ $(''.pdf-wrapper').hide();
$(''.pageTitle').addClass('text-bold'); });
```



Put down your phone, and don't look up the word "phubbing" right now. Go talk to a real person about it instead.

Christina Pay, associate professor with Utah State University Extension, said that "phubbing," or phone snubbing, is the act of ignoring the person you are with by focusing on your phone. It is one of many digital distractions eroding relationships with family and friends.

"Small, repeated moments of missed attention often shape relationships more than major conflicts," Pay said. "When partners feel ignored in everyday interactions, it can degrade emotional closeness and trust over time."

Research suggests that "phubbing" is associated with lower couple relationship satisfaction, decreased intimacy, and increased conflict. Even brief distractions, such as glancing at a phone during a conversation, can signal disinterest and diminish a person's willingness to communicate.

Rather than suggesting that people eliminate technology, Pay suggests "intentional presence." Her framework for strengthening relationships centers on four key principles: rituals, empathy, appreciation, and laughter.

Rituals, such as screen-free dinners or daily check-ins, help establish consistent connection. **Empathy** involves active listening and responding with curiosity rather than distraction. **Appreciation** focuses on expressing

gratitude through small, specific acknowledgments.

Laughter promotes bonding and diffuses tension.

"Connection grows through consistency, not complexity," Pay said. "Simple, intentional actions can make a meaningful difference."

She encourages individuals to reflect on how their phone use may affect others' feelings and the overall relationship satisfaction. Recognizing these patterns is the first step toward change.

Pay described how a moment of shared laughter over a simple mishap can help relationships, illustrating how humor can turn stressful situations into bonding experiences.

"Ultimately, meaningful relationships thrive not through perfection, but through presence," she said. "So put down your phone and enjoy being 'all there' with those you care about."

For more information about relationships and family resources, visit relationships.usu.edu.

Contact

Christina Pay
Christina.Pay@usu.edu

More Extension Updates

- [Extension News](#)
- [Gardening](#)
- [Recipes](#)
- [Personal Finance](#)
- [Relationships](#)
- [Our Impact](#)

[Tips Sign Up](#) [Take a Course](#) [Donate to Extension](#)