"If you're having dinner with friends and family, *be* with them"

I love the question, “What are the manners for text messaging?” because it gives me a chance to talk about how manners evolve. We don’t just make them up here at The Emily Post Institute. What we do is consider the medium, think about what’s respectful and considerate, listen to the public, and then articulate the manners we see evolving. So when I was asked recently by Sara Rimer of *The New York Times* , “What about text messaging at the dinner table?” it was an easy answer – “It’s not good manners!”

If your meal is just about nourishment and you are by yourself in the kitchen, text away. No problem! But if you’re having dinner with friends and family, *be* with them. As I told Sara , “The family meal is a social event, not a food ingestion event.” Even if your phone is in your lap, the people with you all know what you’re doing when you’re eyes are focused on your lap. Just because it’s a quiet activity (unlike a phone call), you’re not fooling anyone. And then everyone’s attention is on the fact that your attention is on your phone, not on them.

The guideline is that you do not text message when you are involved in any type of social interaction – conversation, listening, in class, at a meeting or, especially, at the dinner table. If you really need to communicate with someone who is not at the event – or at the table – excuse yourself and then return as soon as you can.

If you haven’t clicked through yet, check out Sara Rimer’s article in *The New York Times* . It’s a great piece on how different people feel about texting at the dinner table, plus there is a lively discussion happening in the comments section.