



Alone together

Lesson code: UB7L-7678-1GKQ

UPPER-INTERMEDIATE+
(B2-C1)

 British English

1 Warm-up

How much time do you spend with your family at home?

2 Key words

Match the words to their definitions, and then put them in the correct sentences below.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. a concern | a. a deep understanding of a complicated problem |
| 2. neglect | b. existing now, modern |
| 3. an insight | c. something that causes you to worry |
| 4. equate | d. to not care about or pay attention to something/someone |
| 5. witness (something) | e. to say that one thing is the same as another thing |
| 6. contemporary | f. to see something happen |

1. The new study offers an insight into the lives of Eskimos.
2. Over the years, Mark has continued to _____ his house. It's in a bad condition now.
3. Mrs Brown prefers _____ music to older music.
4. My main _____ is that you are spending too much time watching television!
5. Did anyone _____ the accident?
6. People often _____ money with happiness.

3 Before you read

Decide if the statements below are true or false. Talk with your partner about it and then read the article on the next page to check if you were right.

1. Children spent less time around their parents in 2015 than in 2000.
2. Nowadays, families spend less time watching TV and more time on family meals.
3. Children and parents both spent the same amount of time using their phones when they are together.
4. In the US, teenagers spend less time outside the home away from their parents.
5. Nowadays, more time together at home means more quality time with your family.



THE CONVERSATION

Alone together

How mobile devices have changed family time.

- 1 There is now widespread concern about the amount of time children spend staring at screens – with many people worried about the negative impacts mobile devices might have on health and well-being.
- 2 Concerns have also been raised about the influence of technological change on relationships and face-to-face interactions. Sherry Turkle, a professor of the social studies of science, came up with the famous term "alone together" – which is also the name of her book. "Alone together" captures this idea of spending time on devices and neglecting interactions with those who are physically nearby.
- 3 Many people believe that technological changes have had a harmful impact on the time family members spend together – with "alone together" time colonising family life. Yet, to date, very few studies have actually been done in this area.
- 4 One recent research study, however, looks to change this, by providing the first real insight into how technology has influenced the way families spend their time in the UK. Researchers have analysed time diaries collected by parents and children aged eight to 16 years-old in 2000 and then again in 2015. This was a period that witnessed rapid technological change.
- 5 **More time at home and alone**
Contrary to expectations, children spent more time around their parents in 2015 than in 2000. The extra time equates to just over half an hour more per day. Particularly, all of this additional time near parents was spent at home.
- 6 This was a surprising finding. But looking closer, it was found that children reported they were "alone" during all of this additional time at home with their parents. In this sense then, "alone together" time has increased.
- 7 The analysis also showed some relatively small changes in time for shared family activities, with contemporary families spending less time watching TV and more time on leisure activities and family meals. But the overall time spent in shared activities has remained the same.
- 8 The collected data shows that mobile device usage is directly connected to how people spend their family time. It illustrates that children and parents both spent approximately the same amount of time (around 90 minutes) using mobile devices when they are together.
- 9 All these patterns were found mostly among young people aged 14 to 16. Young people in this group spent around one hour more at home "alone" with their parents in 2015 than in 2000. Mobile device use when near their parents was also more frequent and heavily concentrated.
- 10 **Lack of quality time?**
Academics have long seen the importance of technology to bring families together at home. And while the research does seem to indicate this could be the case, this increase in time at home may also be associated with other issues such as the parent's concerns for their children's safety. Research in the US finds similar patterns of change – with teens spending less time outside the home away from their parents.
- 11 There is increasing evidence that the simple presence of a phone negatively affects face-to-face interactions. Both children and parents were using mobile devices during family meals, television viewing, and other activities. So even though this was for a relatively small amount of time, it may have an unbalanced impact on the quality of this time for family members.
- 12 Of course, in some cases, it is possible that mobile devices are in fact complementing family interactions. If, for example, family members use them for video streaming, to play group games or to contact other relatives. And further research on mobile device use and content is now necessary to help learn their full impact on daily life and move beyond commonly held negative assumptions.
- 13 But what is clear, is that although a rise in "alone together" time means families now spend more time at home, it is not necessarily in a way that feels like quality time.

Adapted from TheConversation.com, Stella Chatzitheochari and Killian Mullan



4 Checking understanding

Answer the questions.

1. What does the term 'alone together' mean?
.....
2. What was significant about the extra time that children spent with their parents in 2015?
.....
3. What is the difference in time spent on shared activities in the family between 2000 and 2015?
.....
4. What is the approximate time for the 'alone together time' in a typical family?
.....
5. In what ways do mobile devices improve family interactions?
.....
6. What is the conclusion of the article?
.....

5 Collocations

Look at the words below and form collocations. Check in the text if you are correct.

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1. widespread | a. assumptions |
| 2. a harmful | b. concern |
| 3. face-to-face | c. families |
| 4. rapid | d. impact on ... |
| 5. contemporary | e. interactions |
| 6. relatively | f. small changes |
| 7. negative | g. technological change |

Now choose five collocations and create your own sentence with each phrase.



6 Prepositional phrases

Complete the phrases with the prepositions below.

about of on on at to together with

1. stare at screens
2. worry _____ the impacts
3. the influence _____ relationships
4. come up _____ an idea
5. spend time _____ devices
6. contrary _____ expectations
7. the importance _____ technology
8. bring families _____

7 Grammar - Tenses from the article

Study the underlined structures in the following sentences from the text and match them to the rules below:

1. Contrary to expectations, children spent more time around their parents in 2015 than in 2000.
2. Many people believe that technological changes have had a harmful impact on the time family members spend together.
3. Both children and parents were using mobile devices during family meals, television viewing, and other activities.
4. Yet, to date, very few studies have actually been done in this area.
5. Of course, in some cases, it is possible that mobile devices are in fact complementing family interactions.

a completed event or situation in the past

a habitual action in the past

a present trend/activity in progress

a recent change that started in the past and is now complete

things that happen between a time in the past and now

Now put **present continuous**, **past simple**, **present perfect simple**, **past continuous** next to each sentence.



Complete the sentences below with the following verbs in the appropriate tenses. More than one structure may be possible.

be

make (x2)

witness

have

use

be transformed

spend

1. In 2005, people _____ more time talking on the phone than today.
2. The way we live and work _____ as a result of the internet.
3. Till now, there _____ several inconclusive studies on the health effects of smartphone radiation.
4. These days, more and more people _____ new friends online.
5. In the past few years, we _____ a decrease in the number of teenagers who smoke.
6. How often _____ people _____ mobile devices in 2010?
7. Do you think mobile devices _____ our lives easier?
8. Technological change _____ a positive and negative impact on people's social behaviour.

8 Talking point

Discuss any of the questions below.

1. How much time do you spend on your electronic devices everyday?
2. Do you think technology affects the quality time you spend with friends or family?
3. Is it easier to make new friends and acquaintances than in the past?



2 Key words

- | | | | | | |
|------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------|------|
| 1. c | 2. d | 3. a | 4. e | 5. f | 6. b |
| 2. neglect | 3. contemporary | 4. concern | 5. witness | 6. equate | |

3 Before you read

- | | | | | |
|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|
| 1. False | 2. False | 3. True | 4. True | 5. False |
|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|

4 Checking understanding

1. spending time on devices while neglecting interactions with people who are physically nearby
2. Children reported they were "alone" during all of this additional time at home with their parents.
3. no difference
4. 90 minutes
5. family members use them for video streaming, to play group games or to contact other relatives
6. Families spend more time together, but this is not necessarily quality time

5 Collocations

- | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. b | 2. d | 3. e | 4. g | 5. c | 6. f | 7. a |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|

6 Prepositional phrases

- | | | | | | | |
|----------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| 2. about | 3. on | 4. with | 5. on | 6. to | 7. of | 8. together |
|----------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|

7 Grammar - Tenses from the article

1. Contrary to expectations, children spent more time around their parents in 2015 than in 2000. - h
2. Many people believe that technological changes have had a harmful impact on the time family members spend together. - i
3. Both children and parents were using mobile devices during family meals, television viewing, and other activities. - j
4. Yet, to date, very few studies have actually been done in this area. - k
5. Of course, in some cases, it is possible that mobile devices are in fact complementing family interactions. - l

- | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. past simple | 2. p. perfect simple | 3. past continuous | 4. p. perfect simple | 5. pres. continuous |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|

Students work alone and check in pairs. Go through the answers with the class, explaining the alternative answers/contexts.

1. were spending/spent
2. has been transformed/was transformed
3. have been
4. are making
5. 've witnessed
6. were people using/did people use
7. have made/are making
8. has had/is having

