



“Hey Cerence, Call Mom” – Celebrating Our Mother Figures This Mother’s Day

May 9, 2022

By Carolyn Chong, Senior Product Manager

In many countries around the world, Mother’s Day was celebrated this year on Sunday, May 8.

With the advent of emails and text messages, it seems enthusiasm for phone calls has waned in recent years. We’ve come to hate calling so much that we’ve even designed our phones to silence a tiny unwanted ring with only the swipe of a finger.

I became effectively allergic to calling as soon as I got my first cell phone. My mom would leave me long, rambling messages when I hadn’t checked in. One Mother’s Day, I was backcountry skiing with no cell reception. I couldn’t call to wish Mom well, so she left me four distressed voicemails and nine missed calls. She had my brother scour my social media to find out if I was alive, even contacting a boy I was quietly dating to find out where I was. To this day, she tells me she was “this close” to calling the police. Of course, I never told her to stop, because those check-in calls were part of her job, her role as a mother. Unpleasant for me, but by nature for her.

My mom and grandmothers like to talk on the phone a lot - to friends, sisters, old colleagues, grandchildren, and me. I love my mother and grandmothers very much. Still, on the phone, my mom has a skill at speaking loud enough for everyone else to hear, and my grandmothers have a knack for reminding me just how dangerous it is to walk alone at night. I’ve been getting quite good at calling them before I get the dreaded, inconvenient voicemail on my phone. After all, I’m a millennial, and we simply don’t do voicemails.

Nowadays, I know they are just expressing love. But at that point in my life, I tried to have the majority of my conversations over text. When I saw a missed call from Mom, I would roll my eyes, grumble, and text to ask what she wanted. But eventually, as I moved away from my hometown, I found myself calling my grandmother on wintery drives home from work or chatting with my mother as I cooked Sunday dinner alone.

Last week, I was chatting with a friend, who happens to be a new mom, about the power of the human voice and what we lose when a voice goes away. In fact, research by anthropologist Leslie Seltzer shows that both phone conversations with mom and hugs from mom trigger similar hormonal [responses](#): a drop in cortisol, which is generally linked to stress, and a rise in oxytocin, which is linked to pleasure and comfort. A follow-up study by Seltzer suggests that mom’s voice – her tones, intonations and rhythms – [triggers soothing effects](#) rather than what she says. In other words, when we hear someone’s voice, the physiological effect we feel is similar to what we would experience if we actually touched them. For years, I convinced myself I’ve been calling mom for her sake, only to now I realize I’ve been calling her for mine.

It’s clear that I’m not alone: In fact, when I looked at the top commands spoken to Cerence-powered in-car assistants, “call mom” is one of the top five utterances globally, and “mom” is the number one requested contact to call. Drivers worldwide are having the same experience as I am... and feeling the benefits of regularly talking to mom, or as they call her, mum, mama, madre, or even mommy bear (just a few of the top 10 names used to refer to mothers).

Happy Mother’s Day from all of us at Cerence!