

on your mind

A PUBLICATION OF CHILD & FAMILY PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES



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TECHNOLOGY: FRIEND OR FOE? MANAGING OUR LIVES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

I love technology. It keeps me regularly in touch with the people I love and care about. I FaceTime with my kids, play Words With Friends with my mother, follow my high-school friends on Facebook and call or text my wife from the tennis court after a great match (or a not-so-great match). Technology helps me stay organized and punctual. It has become an important and enjoyable part of my life and likely has for you, too.

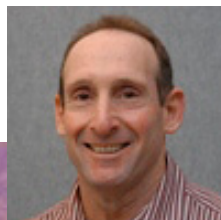
Yet as wonderful as technology can be, if we don't manage this tool well it can damage our relationships and interfere with our ability to function as healthy, successful people. If we're spending too much time plugged in instead of interacting with the real world and the people in it, then it may be time to refresh and reset our priorities.

I have seen technology create problems for people in a number of ways. One way is when someone substitutes electronic relationships for physical ones. They create an illusion of being very connected through online friendships, yet they are profoundly lonely and isolated offline. Another problem is Internet addiction, whether to video games, pornography or social media. I have talked with clients who have played a video game continuously for more than 24 hours causing them to miss meals, sleep and schoolwork. An addiction to pornography can interfere with a person's ability to develop healthy intimate relationships and can severely strain existing relationships.

The key is finding balance — between connecting online and offline. Recently I challenged myself to unplug for a day. This meant no TV, iPad, computer or cell phone. It was challenging, but I think I enjoyed my day as much, if not more, than any other day. Consider challenging yourself to an unplugged day.

This issue of On Your Mind includes articles on various areas related to our use of technology. As always, I welcome your feedback on this publication through our website, childandfamilypsych.com.

Larry Beer, Ed.D.
CFPS President



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Child & Family Psychological Services, PC.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE childandfamilypsych.com

HOW TO STAY 'PLUGGED IN' TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP

by **PAUL HOSKINS**

Licensed Professional Counselor
Limited Licensed Psychologist
Limited Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist



“You don’t listen to me! All you want to do is play on that stupid phone!”

As a marriage and family therapist, I

have listened to many struggling couples argue over how they use technology. At its best, technology can help couples feel more connected, but if technology starts to feel like an uninvited third person in a relationship, there could be a *disconnect* problem. Keeping technology friendly in a relationship can be as simple as exercising good judgment and refocusing priorities.

Let’s start with the smartphone. Many people have difficulty keeping their eyes and fingers away from these electronic de-

vices while talking with their partner. The problem here is that if you’re distracted from the conversation, you’re missing an opportunity to connect with your partner

and to let your partner know that what he or she is saying is important enough that it warrants your undivided attention.

Marriage and family therapy researcher John Gottman, Ph.D., referred to these opportunities as “bids for connection.” Gottman’s research has shown that responding appropriately during these small moments

over time is foundational to a healthy relationship. He explains that when someone attempts to engage you in conversation, they are making a “bid for connection.” You can turn toward that bid by putting down the phone and responding with attention and enthusiasm; you can turn away from the bid by remaining preoccupied with your phone; or you can turn against the bid by responding in a hostile manner (for example, “Just shut up for a minute – I need to finish this email.”).

Gottman describes the results of these interactions over time as if the relationship has an “emotional bank account.” Turning toward your partner is like adding money to this emotional/relational bank account; turning against or away is like pulling money out of the account. If you turn away or against too often you will drain the account and probably damage the relationship.

Just as couples often feel more financially secure when they have extra money in the bank to cover life’s unexpected expenses such as pricey car repairs, by consistently turning towards your partner you can help provide some emotional and

relational security. This security will make it more likely that the relationship will endure life’s challenges, such as an online affair (which I will discuss later in this arti-

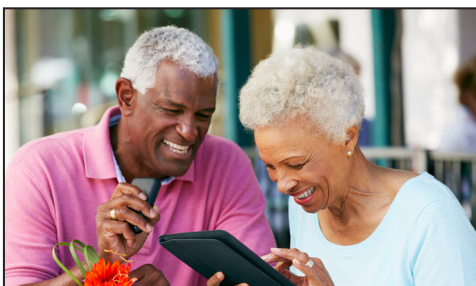
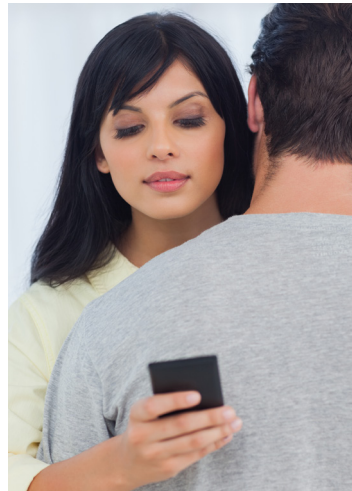
cle). Just like the constant flow of a water deepens a river over time, consistently turning toward your partner over time can deepen your relationship bond.

If your use of technology could be affecting your relational bank account, don’t wait until the relationship is damaged to make healthy changes in how you communicate

with your partner and how you use technology. The first step is to put down the phone and give your partner the respect and attention that can help make him or her feel loved and important. You and your partner may also want to consider establishing technology-free zones, such as the bedroom, or time periods, such as mealtimes.

Another technology-related issue that commonly arises in marriage counseling is Internet affairs — online relationships involving emotional intimacy and sometimes cybersex activity. The Internet has created an environment where emotional affairs are easy to start and relatively easy to hide. If you start feeling like you need to hide what you are doing online from your partner, that is a good indication you should stop whatever you are doing for the good of the relationship.

My advice is to set firm boundaries for using technology. Be open with your partner and avoid keeping secrets or hiding activities from your partner. Sometimes emotional affairs turn into physical affairs and this can potentially damage a relationship beyond repair.



TECH FOR TWO

Technology doesn’t have to be all bad in a relationship; in fact, it can help bring the two of you closer together. Try using your smartphone to send an unexpected “thinking of you” or “good morning, handsome” text to your partner or to make a plan for dinner together. Set up a shared calendar just for the two of you. Leave a flirtatious voice message. Challenge him or her to a round of Words With Friends or watch TV together. Technology can seem much friendlier when it becomes a shared experience.

AVOID LOSING SLEEP OVER YOUR DIGITAL DEVICES

by **PAMELA MARX, RN**

Licensed Professional Counselor

Limited Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist



One of the questions I always ask new clients regardless of why they are seeking counseling is, “How are you

sleeping?” Lack of sleep can be a cause of emotional distress, a symptom of emotional distress, or both. Sleep is so important for our physical and mental health that I don’t stop there. I ask my clients about the number of hours they typically sleep, their bedtime routine, what they eat before bed, and more. Now that I think about it, I ask a lot of questions about sleep. Why do I take so much interest in a client’s sleep patterns and habits?

We all can describe how we feel the day after a sleepless night: grumpy, unable to concentrate or focus, and no energy. Besides making us feel bad, lack of sleep, especially if it is chronic, has been linked to a number of health issues, including cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, stroke, depression, anxiety, diabetes and obesity.

A leading culprit of sleep deficiency is something many of us have come to love and rely on: electronic media.

Computers, tablets, televisions and cell phones can be wonderful; they give us access to all sorts of information and entertainment and the ability to stay in contact with others from almost anywhere. But if we overuse electronic devices and especially if we use them too close to bedtime, they can wreak havoc on our ability to get a good night’s sleep.

Electronics can disturb sleep in a couple of ways. First, using

electronic devices — whether to respond to emails, surf the web or play video games — is cognitively stimulating. As your brain revs up, its electrical activity increases and neurons start to race, all of which is counterproductive to winding down for sleep. Second, these types of activities can make your body tense and therefore release cortisol, a stress hormone that makes it hard to sleep.

Also working against sleep is the blue light emitted by screen devices. By mimicking daytime, the light causes our bodies to suppress melatonin, a hormone that naturally increases at night in response to darkness and helps induce sleepiness. Research has shown that just minutes of screen stimulation can delay melatonin release by several hours.

The best way to get better sleep is to turn off all electronics an hour before bedtime. If you want to read, read an old-fashioned paper book rather than a tablet. If you must use electronics prior to going to bed, reduce blue light exposure by wearing amber-tinted glasses that specifically eliminate the blue light spectrum known to disrupt melatonin production. Also, try lowering the brightness level of your screen and/or holding the screen at least 14 inches from your face.

You can also download a free app

called Flux that automatically changes the color settings of your device’s screen based on the time of the day. After dusk, the colors gradually become warmer and less bright to mimic sunset.

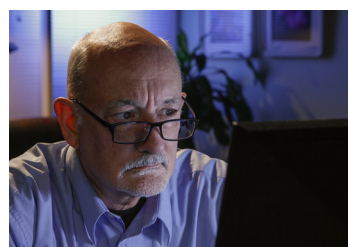
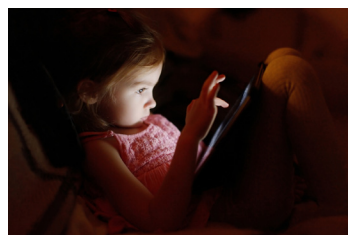
Finally, if you always feel compelled to respond to emails and texts as soon as they come in and to frequently check for updates on Facebook and Instagram, practice reducing your anxiety about keeping up with everything and everyone. You might find that it’s very freeing — and that sleep comes much easier.



PERKS OF A GOOD NIGHT’S SLEEP

Research has shown that getting enough quality sleep can have both physical and mental health benefits.

Health experts say that a good night’s sleep can help you eat less, make better decisions, stay focused, learn better, look more attractive, improve your sex life, exercise better, be easier to get along with and fight off infections.



LOOKING TO REFRESH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH? THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

by **ERICA J. GERGELY, Ph.D.**

Licensed Psychologist



In today's technologically saturated world, there is no shortage of valid health-related reasons to disconnect from

our mobile devices. Yet we mustn't overlook the potential health benefits these handheld gadgets can bring straight to our fingertips. If you're looking to refresh your health, and more specifically your mental health, listed below are seven free mobile applications that can have a positive impact on your body and mind.

**Please note that these mobile applications are intended for use as an adjunct to, and should not replace, professional treatment.*

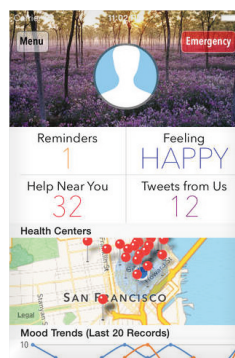
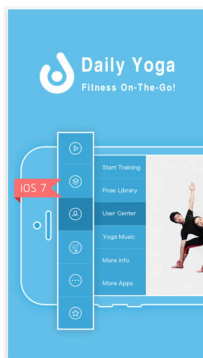
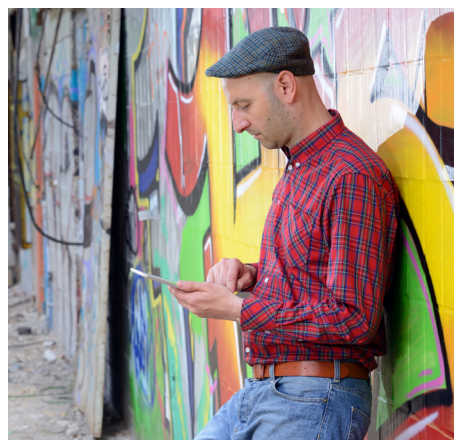
Breathe2Relax — This app teaches hands-on, easy-to-follow diaphragmatic breathing exercises for stress reduction, mood stability, anger control and anxiety management. Users are guided by instructional audios and videos to counteract the body's "fight or flight" (stress) response and achieve a state of calmness and relaxation. A unique feature allows the rate, speed and depth of breathing to be adjusted for the user's personal comfort.

Daily Yoga — This yoga coaching application provides an on-the-go mind/body workout suitable for all levels. Videos offer step-by-step instructions, and users can focus on specific areas of the body through dozens of poses and exercises in a variety of intensities. A global yoga community offers the opportunity to stay connected and motivate others.

Optimism — This self-tracking application helps users identify and understand factors that impact their mood and overall

health. Users regularly record their emotional states, along with other factors such as their daily quality and quantity of sleep, amount of exercise, consumption of caffeine and alcohol, and potential emotional triggers. Data can be converted into charts and reports that provide an overall picture of mood and allow for detection of patterns and the development of strategies to maintain wellness.

Parenting2Go — Developed to help military parents strengthen and reconnect with their families after disruptions caused by deployments, Parenting2Go offers tools and guided exercises to help parents shift gears between work and home, become more mindful during family time, cope when feeling stressed or overwhelmed, manage challenging parenting situations and communicate positively with their children. It also gives



users quick access to their personal support network and resources for professional mental health care.

ReliefLink — This award-winning app developed for suicide prevention can also be used as a general mood and behavior tracker. Users can create a personalized safety plan, set up medication and appointment reminders and link to their online social network. The app tweets regular inspirational affirmations and includes an emergency button for connection to helplines, mental health providers, 911 and family/friends. Also included are coping tools such as voice-recorded mindfulness exercises and music for relaxation.

T2 Mood Tracker — Designed for service men and women to track their emotional and behavioral patterns following deployment, this award-winning app is now a go-to, self-help resource for both military members and civilians worldwide. Users can track their emotions in real-time and receive accurate ratings of symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress. Data is saved over time and can be displayed as a graph. Users can email their data to their health care provider so their symptoms can be monitored throughout treatment.

Virtual Hope Box — To help individuals regulate their emotional and physical states and facilitate healthy coping, VHB uses personalized and supportive audio, video, pictures, games, mindfulness exercises, positive messages, activity planning, inspirational quotes and other valuable tools. Users can upload their own photos, record words and videos from loved ones, listen to soothing sounds and music, and engage in guided imagery, controlled breathing and muscle relaxation to decrease their experience of distress.

STRATEGIES FOR HEALTHY TECHNOLOGY USE AMONG CHILDREN AND TEENS

by JANEÉ STEELE, Ph.D.

Licensed Professional Counselor



The use of technology and social media continues to increase among all segments of our society, not the least

of which includes children and teens. The Pew Research Center, for example, has reported that 92 percent of teens ages 13 to 17 use the Internet daily, and 56 percent of teens go online several times a day.

Beyond the Internet, children and teens are also increasingly consuming television, gaming systems, tablets and cell phones. Research conducted by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop found that children ages 8-10 spend 5.5 hours a day using digital media; and when you consider that these children are often “media multi-tasking” — i.e., using more than one type of media at the same time, such as watching cartoons on TV while playing games on a tablet — that number jumps to 8 hours per day.

While there are many benefits to technology, excessive screen time can have harmful effects on children’s behavior, health and school performance. These effects range from worsening of executive functions, such as planning, prioritizing, organizing and impulse control, to increased loneliness and depression. Here are six strategies to help you encourage healthy and appropriate technology use among your kids:



1. Be a good role model.

Technology habits are learned. Parents should set a good example for their children by using technology appropriately and respectfully. That means not using your cell phone or checking email at the dinner table or during family time, and certainly never while driving. Also, practice proper social media etiquette by not encouraging or engaging in arguments or bullying on Facebook or other platforms.

2. Limit time spent with technology.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, screen time for children and teens should be limited to two hours per day, and that time should involve high-quality content. Additionally, the AAP recommends parents establish screen-free zones in the home where there are no TVs, gaming systems or computers. Television and other media should be avoided for children under the age of 2.

3. Monitor the use of technology.

Become familiar with the media your children are using. As suggested by mental health expert and author Dr. Gregory L. Jantz, “Play their video games. Watch their television programs. Visit the websites they frequent. Read their texts, emails and posts to their social media pages.” Let your children know that your right to monitor their activities earns them the privilege of using their devices.

4. Talk about the dangerous side of technology.

Technology, the Internet in particular, can provide a platform for illicit behavior. Discuss with your children the legal, safety and social risks of behaviors such as sexting and cyber-



bullying. Also talk about the potentially negative consequences of excessive use of technology, including risks to physical and mental health.

5. Establish rules thoughtfully.

All families are different; establish rules that will meet your family’s specific needs. While developing these rules, it is important to listen carefully to and strongly consider your children’s input. They should feel like they have some say in their rules. If children believe they are powerless to influence the rules, they are more likely to find ways of skirting them and hiding legitimate concerns from their parents. But remember that while your children may have a say in the rules, the ultimate decision belongs to you. Be specific about prohibiting viewing of inappropriate content, including violence, explicit sexual content and glorified tobacco and alcohol use, as well sending or receiving inappropriate images or information.

6. Recognize that this is hard work.

Life is very busy, and it is easy to let your children have their way with technology since it can free up time for you to attend to the myriad of other tasks that call for your attention. The time and energy you spend in setting and monitoring healthy limits, though, will pay large dividends in your children’s emotional well-being down the road.

SEARCHING FOR LOVE? TRY LOOKING ONLINE

by **BRIDGET NOLAN**

Limited Licensed Psychologist
Licensed Professional Counselor



Once considered the solitary realm of the nerdy and socially challenged, online dating has come a long

way. Online dating creates a unique space for individuals to meet and communicate with one another over the Internet. It has become an acceptable, convenient and effective way to meet a significant other. Most people use online dating services to initiate a personal, romantic or sexual connection, usually with the intention of developing a long-term relationship.

Not surprisingly, love, dating and relationships are a hot topic in therapy sessions. I encourage my clients who are considering online dating to first take an inventory of their own qualities and characteristics, as well as those they would like to see in a potential mate. Whatever avenue of dating you choose to explore, it is critical to stay true to yourself so that you're more likely to find someone who is the right fit. Identify your best qualities and be proud of them. Confidence is attractive and sends the message that you are important. (If you have self-esteem challenges, consider taking steps to improve your self-image, such as talking to a close friend, learning a new skill or seeking counseling. You will enjoy online dating — or any dating — much more if you're feeling good about yourself.)

Online dating websites can differ by their membership size, features (such as compatibility matching) and cost (most require a membership fee). Websites consistently ranked

among the best include *zoosk*, *match* (my personal favorite) and *eHarmony*. Other popular dating sites include *PlentyOfFish*, *OkCupid*, *ChristianMingle*, *OurTime*, *SeniorPeopleMeet*, *Chemistry* and *SingleFitPeople*. There truly is a site for everyone.

Creating a profile is the first step to begin dating online. A profile is the unique, customizable area that contains information about you and what you are looking for in a partner.

Here are some tips for creating an exceptional profile:

- Be honest. You are not doing yourself any favors by lying.
- Be confident. Tell people what is wonderful about you.
- Let people know about yourself *and* what you are looking for in a partner.
- Ask a close family member or friend to help you — someone who knows all about you and will help you identify your best qualities.
- Use spell check. Misspelled words give the world a message that you do not care about or take pride in what you are doing.
- Include a *current* photo, and don't forget to give a genuine smile.

Following are some general tips for using online dating services:



- Respond to *every* email or message you receive. It is important to keep an open mind!
- Keep confidential and identifying information private. Be choosy about who you give your full name, phone number and address to.
- Communicate (phone, text, email) a few times with potential dates before meeting up with them.
- Always make your first meeting/date at a public venue and notify someone of your plans.
- Most importantly, *be exactly who you are*. The more you express your true nature, the greater your chances of rejection. Yes, I said it. You *will* get rejected. Consider the rejecting person someone who is doing you a favor. You want to be with someone who likes you for being *you*. Embrace who you are.

The most challenging part of online dating can be sifting through the masses until you find your special person. Speaking personally, in the end, all of the sifting was worth it. Online dating led me to the best choice I have made in my life: my husband, Eric. Go ahead, take time for you, and maybe you'll find someone special, too!

THE CFPS MANIFESTO

A manifesto, defined as a "public declaration of policy and aims," is similar to a mission statement.

When the CFPS staff came together at Pretty Lake Vacation Camp last spring for our annual staff retreat, I led an exercise titled simply, "Questions for Contemplation." Participants were asked to think about questions such as What do you believe? What inspires you? What are your hopes? Your fears? What do you need from your teammates? What do you need from you? They

wrote down answers, and we shared and discussed them in small groups. Each group came away with 5 to 10 shared values or ideals to contribute to the larger group.

Ultimately, through a fun and collaborative process, we chose 20 shared values and ideals that resonated with everyone. These ideals formed our manifesto.

We as a group feel really good about both the manifesto and the process we experienced to create it. We now have it displayed on our website, on T-shirts and on mugs. Others have found it to be inspirational, and we hope that you appreciate it in a similar way. Credit also goes to my friend Barry Simon who designed the content into an attractive wordable.

On behalf of the staff of CFPS, I hope that you will appreciate the messages contained in our manifesto and invite you to comment through our website about your personal favorites.

— Larry Beer, President

IT'S ABOUT

RELATIONSHIPS

With Yourself and Others...

EMBRACE CHANGE

BE BRAVE

Welcome Challenges
& Push the Limits

Strive for Balance

Pursue Your Passions

Unplug and Reset

Seek Common Ground

Honor Differences

Trust in Your

Resilience

Be Kind, Respectful & Compassionate

Play Often Laugh a Lot

MOVE TOWARD FORGIVENESS

Learn From Your Mistakes & Successes

Every Moment Is An Opportunity

Connect With Others Connect With Yourself

Celebrate Often

Stay Positive

**Avoid Avoiding
& Get Things Done**

Win Some Lose Some

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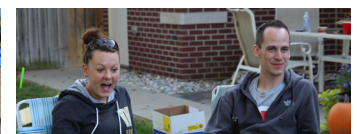
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We are a diverse group of psychologists, counselors and social workers dedicated to providing the highest quality mental health services to people needing guidance as they face life's challenges. In a caring, comfortable setting, we serve clients of all ages through individual, couple, family and group counseling.

Our therapists specialize in a wide range of areas, including depression, anxiety, loss and grief, relationships, parenting, teen issues, behavioral issues, learning problems, gay and lesbian concerns, addictions, and transitions, among many others. In addition, we offer psychological evaluations and testing services.

For a complete list of our therapists and their areas of expertise and interest, as well as a list of our therapy groups, visit our website at childandfamilypsych.com.

To make an appointment to see a therapist at either our Kalamazoo or Portage location, please call our business office at **(269)372-4140**. Our support staff will be happy to work with you in choosing an appropriate therapist based on your needs and preferences.

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