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CONNECTIONS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & PERSONAL GROWTH

FAMILIES AND TECHNOLOGY

10 Ways to Use Technology Without Hurting Your Family

1 **Parents should lead the way** Couples that have children need to set the standard by using technology appropriately. In other words, technology should not replace relationships, activities, and/or roles that could help the family move forward.

2 **Use Safe Internet Practices** The internet can be a wonderful tool. Unfortunately, any great tool can be used in harmful ways. Understanding how to avoid identity fraud and security breaches is an important economic need. Setting up content filters to protect children is equally important.

3 **Avoid Technology Addiction** Addiction is defined as a harmful behavior in which the individual has difficulty stopping. Harmful behavior would include harm to social and/or occupational roles. Addiction to pornography is a growing concern and can take away from the ability of couples to form and/or maintain intimate relationships.

4 **Balance Technology Time** Time spent on video games, surfing the internet, chatting, etc. can lead to addictive behaviors due to the amount of time and attention it takes away from relationship and family time.

5 **Seek to Understand** Some are resistant to learn about technology. In many ways, it is like learning a new language. Willingness to learn about technology can help one protect a family from different technology dangers. On the other hand, it can add new tools in helping the family in a number of areas including learning, staying connected, organizing, being prepared, etc.

6 **Remember Eating** Many people get into bad eating habits when technology takes over their life. They end up eating while surfing the net or working on projects over the computer which usually means snack foods (a.k.a., high cholesterol, high sodium). Separating technology time from meal time is a good boundary to maintain.

Couples & Technology

Chesley (2006) has found that certain types of technology are growing increasingly popular among couples more than other types. For example, it appears that the usage of the Internet and e-mail seems to catch on quicker for couples that have not been using new technology as compared to using cell phones and pagers. Husband's usage of technology also showed an increase in wife's usage of technology two years later. Thus, if a husband begins to use the internet, his wife also will likely use it within two years.

It appears that technology can sometimes help families and sometimes hurt families. Chesley (2005) conducted another study which found that cell phone usage over time was significantly related to increased distress and lower family satisfaction; however, computer usage showed no significant relationship to family satisfaction or distress. The overall conclusions of the study suggested that technology usages may be blurring work/

7 **Remember Books** Many people have replaced many aspects of technology with good old reading. Reading books can add flavor and depth to individual and family life versus the quick-paced information of websites. Find a balance between sources of learning in order to work different parts of the brain as well as find different layers of knowledge.

8 **Remember the Outside** Some people that get addicted to technology forget that grass, sunlight, and trees are more than a picture on a website. Video-gaming in children also has been shown to reduce exercise and socialization time. Physical activity is an important part of life and can be magnified when engaging in exercise with fresh air and sunshine.

9 **Remember Face-to-Face Communication** One of the downfalls of communication through the internet, cell phone, text-messaging, etc. is that there is no non-verbal communication. One of the dangers of internet dating is that it is more difficult to get to know "the real person" behind the user name. Having face-to-face communication not only improves the integrity of personhood, it allows for more emotionally intimate relationships to occur through the use of eyesight, touch, and other human senses.

10 **Remember the Dinner Table** A number of researchers have begun to look at the impact of families not eating together at the dinner table anymore. For many, the computer desk has replaced the dinner table. Technology can be an obstacle for having family meal time. Eating together at the dinner table is another example of a boundary a family can set in order to prevent technology from replacing quality time.

Internet Relationships

Lawson and Leck (2006) examined the world of internet dating. They explored motivations, styles of courtship, and how couples dealt with problems of trust and deception. Overall, it appears that some online daters are looking for companionship while others are seeking comfort after a life crisis. Other daters are seeking an environment in which they can be in more control over their presentation while having freedom from commitment. Some daters listed the desire to avoid stereotypical roles while some sought for adventure and romantic fantasy. It is interesting to note that most of the participants studied eventually met their online partners which sometimes led to abrupt rejection and with others leading to marriage.

family boundaries. In other words, technology creates a bridge between two roles in which work is done at home and family is "dealt with" at work.

Some studies have examined gender difference in regards to email usage. Boneva, Kraut, and Frohlich (2001) found that women used email in more personal ways than men as they connected with long-distance friends and family. The study showed that women were more likely to fill emails with personal content as a means to maintain an emotional relationship. In addition, women found emails more enjoyable than men overall, when used to keep relationships connected. The researchers indicate that previously suggested gender differences in communication explain the reasons why women may gain more satisfaction from emails than men.

Overall, it appears that technology has added a new factor to the mix as families learn how to build and maintain relationships. Technology has been shown to both help and hurt families depending on its usage. It would be wise for couples and families to examine how technology can be a helpful tool rather than a hindrance to the success of family relationships.

The website *www.wiredsafety.org* offers a number of helpful tips for various technology issues. They list the following tips for those interested in safe cyber-dating:
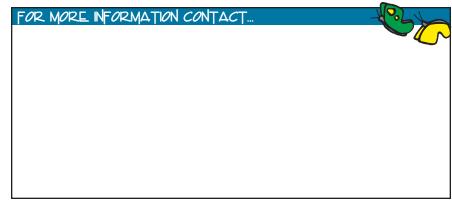
- Do not believe everything you read online.
- Do not give out personal information online.
- Take your time – do not rush into things.
- Honesty is the best policy.
- Start with a phone call.
- When you do meet, do it with a friend in a public place.
- Tell a friend.
- Never leave or go home with them.
- Report any attacks or threats to law enforcement.
- Do not be embarrassed to insist on following the rules.
- Make sure you are using a reputable online dating service or chat.
- If you are being cyber-stalked or harassed, get help.

(This issue based on a document from *www.myfamilysolutions.com* written by W. Jared DuPree, MS)

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