



Technology Tips and Traps in Your Relationship

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The waves of technology have entered the pools of marriage and family life. Smartphones, laptops, computers, and tablets are owned by a majority of Americans, with 81% owning smartphones (McDaniel & Coyne, 2014). These devices serve many purposes whether it be work, email, phone calls, text messages, or keeping the kids entertained for five minutes while a parent takes a break.

Though technology has many meaningful purposes, it can also be damaging to relationships. Now, more than ever, marriages suffer due to technology and social media (Williams, 2014). This fact sheet will help you be aware of some of the positive and negative effects of technology and how to protect your marriage from being swamped by it.

Technoference

Technoference is a new term that refers to the everyday disturbances in the interactions between you and your partner caused by technology (McDaniel, 2014). Today, many of us are so preoccupied with checking email, answering calls, or scrolling through Facebook or Instagram that we often fail to realize the potential negative effects it has on our relationship. Your partner could be having a bad day, telling an exciting story, or sharing personal thoughts while we mindlessly check our devices. The result? While we are preoccupied in what is happening in the technological world, we missed the opportunity to connect with our spouse. In a study by McDaniel and Coyne (2014), women were more likely to experience negative emotions due to technoference. A whopping 70% of the 114 women in their study felt their relationship was impacted by

technoference. Here are some warning signs:

- Negative work/family spillover is a sign of technoference (McDaniel & Coyne, 2014). Spillover refers to having parts of your life collide—such as work stress impacting family life. It can be challenging to balance work at home on your phone, tablet, or computer. Once you are home—be home. Make a habit to put down the electronics and enjoy time with your spouse and/or children.
- Technoference is related to lower marital satisfaction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2014). When repeated technoference interferes with the connection between you and your partner, you may be at risk. Daily connection between spouses is very important to keep the relationship strong.
- To assess how plugged in you are, here are some questions from one scholar to ask yourself: How often are you on your device during family time, and is it necessary? Why are you on the device? How do you think your partner feels while you are on your device during family time? (McDaniel, 2015). If you feel you need to adjust your habits after answering these questions, do it! You and your spouse will reap the rewards.

How Can I Use Technology to Benefit My Relationship?

Though there may be negative effects related to technoference, technology can be used for many positive things to help grow your relationship. There are several ways you can connect with your spouse through social media, email, text message,

instant messenger, etc.

- Relationship expert Dr. John Gottman, uses what he calls a “bid for connection” as one of his core principles in making a marriage work (2015). These “bids” are everyday interactions between people. The more positive interactions you have, the more potential for connection. The use of technology can be a fun way of making and responding to bids for connection throughout your day. Connecting through technology can be as simple as sending your spouse a love note via text or email; posting a picture on their Facebook wall, and publicly praising your spouse for all they do; taking a selfie on Snapchat and send it to your partner; or sending each other funny memes. These suggestions are great ways to connect with your partner throughout the day and strengthen your relationship.

Tips to Remember

As challenging as it can be to break the unhealthy habit of checking our devices, it is possible. Here are tips to help you become less tech-dependent.

- It is okay to unplug occasionally by putting away technology. When you get home from work, or are sitting around after dinner, remember to put your devices down and spend quality time with your spouse and family. Ask them questions to connect. What was the best part of their day? The worst? Share stories, laugh, and enjoy each other’s company.
- Keep technology out of the bed. For many couples, the cell phone is the last thing partners see at night and the first thing they look at in the morning. Experts suggest beds are for sleeping, sex, and maybe reading—not spending time on your phone.
- Sit down with your spouse and set boundaries related to how and where the technology will be used. You could decide to make the dinner table a no tech zone. While many parents set “techno-curfews”

when all technology will be turned off and/or turned on, it may be helpful to have similar curfews for couples.

- Fight the unsettling urge to check your device while speaking or spending time with your partner. Pay attention to what they have to say. Empathize with their bad day. Celebrate the good. Be aware of how they feel when you are plugged in. It may be helpful to occasionally discuss how each partner feels about technology use and its potential for disrupting the relationship.

In a society where much is dependent on technology, don’t be. Breaking habits can be hard, and may seem never ending. Stick to it. You will have to continuously put forth effort to control your technology, but your relationship will flourish. Share this fact sheet with your spouse and talk about how the two of you can work on breaking unhealthy habits and develop positive habits, without getting drowned by technofeference.

References

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