The Sand Paper

Spring 2015

What's Inside

Communication Technology: Both a Boon and Barrier

by Dr. Gretchen Stein, President & CEO of The Sand Creek Group.

We have all heard the expression, "No man is an island." These words emphasize a person's basic need for connections to other people and to his or her surroundings. We need to be connected with those we care most about in order to build relationships and nurture our intimacy or feelings of closeness whether it be partners, parents, family, or friends.

Relationships of all kinds are always changing and they need time and attention in order to be built and strengthened.

Technology today plays a significant role in building connections. Social media allows us to be connected to the lives of 100's if not 1000's of 'friends'. Today, we can know what is going on in the day-to-day life of a person we haven't seen in decades, but happened to know in high school. We can share pictures of what we ate for lunch with the world. But is this the kind of connection that builds intimacy, or simply acts as a substitute or a distraction from quality time with those we love?

When was the last time you set aside time to be alone to talk or play with the person or persons you care the most about in your life? I mean, really alone together. I see parents walking children in strollers all the time, but they are not connected to their precious child in the stroller for this shared time together. They are talking to someone not present on their cell phone. How many questions would a young child ask if their parent was not talking on the phone? Would they be able to learn about butterflies, trees or their parent? Teachable moments come when a child has an interest and the attention of an adult with whom to connect.

How often have you been to a restaurant and have seen a couple sitting at a table each texting someone else and not relating to one another? Quality time dedicated to listening to your partner and sharing your thoughts is foundational to building love in a relationship. It is time to stop and think more about what we are losing when we are not setting aside precious time to connect face to face with those we love, without technology in the way.

Technology is not good or bad; it is a tool. How we interact with these tools and the choices we make needs to be thoughtful. My life is deeply enriched by new advances in technological communication. With a daughter and grandson living in Europe, I would not have the close communication I have with them without the ability to see and be seen through Skype. When I drive home at night alone, I am thankful to have a cell phone beside me in case of an emergency.

This quarter's Sand Paper looks at some of the ways new technology impacts relationships. I think it is well worth reading and spending some time thinking about. Maybe give this edition to a loved one and have a conversation about what you find in these pages.

Yesterday, I was in a card shop looking for a birthday card for a friend. A card caught my eye in the section of cards devoted to love and friendship. The card read "I'd totally silence my phone for you." Maybe this is the highest form today of expressing love and commitment to building a relationship.

Computer Addiction

By Brad McNaught, M.Div., LADC, CEAP

For some people, the desire to use a computer becomes so strong that computer usage either online or offline interferes with daily routines, relationships, activities and a sense of well-being. Many long term consequences can result from an individual's behavior when using a computer whether as a compulsive gambler, an obsessive shopper, obsessive surfer, or for cybersex.

If you spend more time online or playing offline games on the computer than you intend to or if this time interferes with your obligations then you could be suffering from an addiction to the computer. Although computer addiction is a relatively new problem, there have already been many instances of research and methods of treatment to help those who are addicted to the computer to change their behaviors, understand the causes of their addiction and regain control of their lives.

This addiction is characterized by an excessive desire and subsequent use of the internet or the computer that results in negative consequences socially, financially, physically, emotionally or otherwise for the user. A preoccupation with computers can lead to problems with relationships, problems with productivity or problems with self-care and hygiene.

It's important to recognize that not all people who spend hours each day on the computer are considered addicted. There are many uses for computers and the internet and in many cases, an individual may spend six or more hours in a day on the computer but still not be considered an addict. Each individual situation is different and therefore, there is no set number of hours that is (or is not) considered a potential for computer addiction.

Recognizing the Signs of Computer Addiction
There are many signs that you may recognize if you or someone you love is actually addicted to the computer. Although there is no real physical dependence that can evolve from the excessive usage of computers, there are a number of emotional or psychological issues that can be present. Paying attention to the possible signs of computer addiction will help you to recognize these signs early on and get help if necessary.

Look out for these signs of computer addiction:

- Preoccupation with the computer either online or offline.
- Feeling a burning desire to go online or to use the computer to play a game, to socialize or to develop programming codes.
- Spending time on the computer despite family functions taking place, special events or other activities that you were once happy to be a part of.
- Performing actions on the computer that are outside the realm of what your original plans were such as shopping online when you should be working or playing a game when you should be doing homework.
- Telling lies to your family about the activities that you perform while on the computer, such as saying that you are working on homework when you are actually playing a game.
- Having anxious feelings when you want to use the computer, not knowing when you will be able to use the computer or knowing that your use of the computer will be limited.
- Mood swings or irritability when you are not allowed to spend as much time on the computer as you would like to or if your computer time is interrupted.
- Telling yourself that you will get off the computer at a certain time and then spending more time than you committed.
- Any use of the computer as an escape from your feelings.

"A preoccupation with computers can lead to problems with relationships, problems with productivity or problems with self-care and hygiene."

Computer Addiction Continued…

Effects of Computer Addiction

You may not think that using the computer excessively can have a negative impact on your life but for those who become addicted to the computer, compulsive use can actually lead to a number of lasting consequences in work, home and social life. If you or someone you know is addicted to the computer, you may be experiencing the following effects of compulsive computer use:

- Inability to interact socially except when on the computer such as online in chat groups or social networking sites.
- Inability to experience pleasure when performing tasks that are not done on a computer. You may not feel relief or gratification unless you are taking part in a task that involves using a computer.
- Overspending on hardware, software or other computer items.
- Loss of relationships due to spending too much time on the computer and not enough time with a friend or loved one.
- Loss of a job due to a lack of productivity because time was spent on the computer performing other tasks that provided you with satisfaction.
- Giving up career goals in an effort to spend more time on the computer.
- Lack of productivity on school assignments because you are distracted by your desire to use the computer.
- Feelings of failure because you have tried to control your computer usage and despite your efforts have failed at your attempts.
- Poor self-esteem because you feel socially inept.
- Poor self-hygiene because you are too "busy" in your involvement with the computer to take time out to shower, eat, brush your teeth and hair or otherwise take care of yourself.

Many of the above effects of computer addiction can be easily reversed with time and treatment. For instance, while you may lose a relationship when you are addicted to the computer, getting the treatment you need to overcome the addiction can lead to the building of new, lasting relationships or the re-building of a past relationship that suffered as a result of your addiction.

Self-Help for Computer Addiction

If you think you are addicted to the computer or that you have an internet addiction, there are some actions that you can take on your own to monitor your addiction, reduce your computer usage and get things under control.

The following tips will help you to overcome a computer addiction on your own:

- **Limit your computer use**. You can set a timer, you can have your friends or family members time you or you can come up with another method of timing your computer usage. Make limits for the amount of time that you will spend.
- **Commit to only using the computer for work or school.** If you have a problem with shopping or gambling or other activities on the computer, make a commitment that you will not use the computer unless you have to perform a task for work or school.
- **Place limitations on the location that you will use the computer.** For those who have problems with cybersex, are addicted to gambling or perform other poor tasks on the computer, placing a limitation on the location such as only using the computer in the kitchen or in the dining room may help to put your usage in front of others and reduce risky behaviors.
- **Look for social support.** If you are addicted to the computer, find others who will understand your addiction and talk to them. Talk with your friends and family members about your condition and your desire to change—they too can help you monitor your usage and to stay on track with your goals.
- **Keep a computer diary.** By keeping track of the amount of time that you spend on the computer, the activities that you perform and the emotions that lead up to computer use, you can narrow down times or activities that are performed based on emotions and be better prepared to take control of your addiction and prevent relapse.
- **Get outside help.** While there are advocates for online computer addiction help, this method of treatment seems like it could be rather controversial. This is because, if you are already addicted to the computer, chances are you do not need to go to the computer for help. The best bet is to seek help outside of the home by contacting Sand Creek Group Employee Assistance Program where an assessment and appropriate referral can be provided.

Why I Choose Paper Books Over Digital Print

By DJ. Enga, CFPC with contributions from Amy Wittmann, Librarian

Who hasn't heard the old adage: "Books are our friends". I especially feel that way when thinking about introducing books to babies, toddlers and children. Not only is it physically appealing to hold a child and a book, it also builds a relationship with that child and gives them the pleasure of a story, turning the pages, looking at the pictures, going back a page and discussing the book with the child. They learn to respect a book, not to tear it or break a binding. Kids often remember the book and they remember who read it to them.

It can give them the routine of their story first, then off to bed. (It's recommended to turn off computer devices before bedtime for a good night's sleep!) A child can physically pick a book from a shelf and see it and hold it. I suppose this selection process can also be done on the computer but lifting the flap on a "Spot" book (by Eric Hill) to find something hiding behind that flap is priceless for a child even though they may have done it already many, many times. Also, they can see their progress as they turn the pages. It has a start and an end point that is tactile, movement felt on the fingertips, advancement through a story seen as the pages build to the left, and diminish to the right.
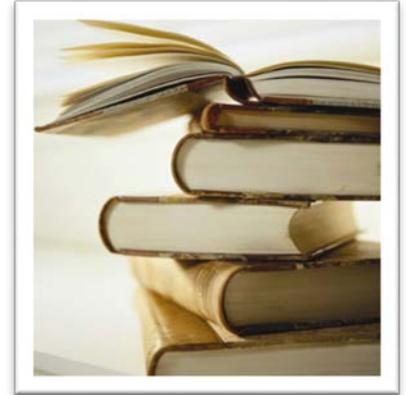
For adults, many of us love the smell of books, the feel of them, being able to highlight passages and write notes in the margins. We go forward in the story or back with ease. Have you ever bought a book at a used book store to find someone else has dog-eared a page, written a note or left a dried flower between the pages? Buying a book like that is like finding special insight and kinship with the person who first loved the book. Someone had left their mark before you as you glean new insight yourself, hiking along the same pages and discovering the story like they did. Knowing that you shared something together.

I once visited a bookseller who had a barn on his property. He had it specially built to be book-friendly. Humidity and heating and cooling were monitored so the books would not be ruined by mold and mildew. He collected thousands of old books and they were all in pristine condition. Many were leather bound and had gold leaf pages and inscriptions. The books were beautiful and housed in antiques shelves. No tablet could compare to this special collection. He bought and sold books but his personal collection was like a wonderful museum and some of the volumes were so ancient that he asked me to never reveal where he lives!

A 2014 article (Flood, 2014) found that readers of a short story on a Kindle were significantly worse at remembering the order of events than those who read the same story in paperback. Lead researcher Anne Mangen, of Norway's Stavanger University, concluded that "the tactile feedback of a Kindle does not provide the same support for mental reconstruction of a story as a print pocket book does."

The tactile experience of a book aids this process, from the thickness of the pages in your hands as you progress through the story to the placement of a word on the page. Mangen hypothesizes that the difference for Kindle readers, "Might have something to do with the fact that the fixity of a text on paper, and this very gradual unfolding of paper as you progress through a story is some kind of sensory offload, supporting the visual sense of progress when you're reading."

Reading an old-fashioned novel is also linked to improving our sleep. When many of us spend our days in front of computer screens, it can be hard to signal to our body that it's time to rest. By reading a paper book about an hour before bed, your brain enters a new zone, distinct from that enacted by reading on an e-reader.

My kids will be inheriting many books when I die. The same Children's books that are barely holding together but were read to me by my grandmother and/or parents, I can never part with them. Books have touched me in some way have helped me get through a tough time in my life. Books have made me laugh and made me cry.   Books I have on hand when friends visit and ask for a recommendation. I'll buy several copies of favorite books just to give them away to my friends. Being able to hand something over to them, rather than pointing them to a web address or link, seems more gratifying.

Source: A. Flood, 2014, August 19th, "Readers Absorb Less on Kindles than Paper Study Finds," Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com

Dear Sandy,

Our 9 year old son gets extremely upset whenever he's unable to play on his tablet. It's not uncommon for him to throw terrible tantrums that include crying, whining and screaming at us for long periods of time. This has caused problems in the family and my husband and I are getting frustrated, do you have any ideas on what we should do?

-My Tech-Obsessed Kid

Dear My Tech-Obsessed Kid,

Numerous studies have illustrated the downside of how too much technology can impact our children, such as sleep loss, ADHD issues, impulsivity, to poor grades and a lack of social skills or desire to connect with others. It's hard to know what to do as a parent. Being tech savvy is an important skill set in our society. It plays a role in a person's ability to navigate in school along with any future career or chosen profession that will eventually come along. The difference is this: They aren't quite there yet. Their brains are still developing. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that elementary aged children be limited to no more than 1-2 hours of technology/gaming per day, with the rest focused on reading books, exercise and an adequate amount of sleep.

Here are some suggestions you and your husband might consider as an approach to helping manage this technology conundrum:

Set clear boundaries. Chances are he will fight you on this, but as in other important aspects of life, children look to their parents to set boundaries based on what is appropriate and in their best interest. Once he knows the boundaries, and that any screaming or crying will not get him what he wants, chances are those meltdowns will diminish and eventually stop altogether.

Establish off-limit times. Learn to enjoy family meals or down time without the television on, or without the intrusion of technology. Create a rule that no entertainment/social technology will be used while homework is being done. Make a habit of tuning out any technology an hour or two before bedtime too.

Be Consistent and Follow through. Take away privileges for any violations of rules, whether it's defiance, not doing chores or not performing well in school. Remember your son is relying upon you and your husband to establish the ground rules. Also consider setting an example for your child by unplugging from technology when appropriate and using that time to reconnect with your loved ones.

Best of Luck!
-Sandy

Source: https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/pages/media-and-children.aspx. Retrieved: 2014, April 8

Send your inquiries for Sandy to info@sandcreekeap.com. We may not be able to publish all inquiries, but all will be responded to via email. Thank you.

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About Our Organization

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers free, confidential assessment, short-term counseling, referral, and follow up. Professional counselors are experienced in helping people identify and find solutions to personal issues such as:

Relationships
Parent/Child Issues
Substance Abuse
Gambling
Loss and Grief
Financial Concerns
Depression
Job Stress
Childcare or Eldercare
And Other Life Concerns

Sand Creek EAP is your program. It's completely confidential, provided at no cost to you, and available to both you and your household family members. When you need help with personal concerns, we're the place to turn.

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