Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Top five things you need to build healthy relationships in the digital age

With the increasing role of technology in our lives, there are new demands on couples that change the ways we relate to our partners. Communication used to just mean face-to-face conversations and phone calls, now there are a myriad of ways people can be in touch with each other, from texting to online chatting, from video calling to public posts on social media. This of course isn't a bad thing - being able to get in touch with your loved ones at the click of a button has aspects of being a dream come true. But it also has some downsides, like a loss of privacy and a feeling of being always in touch and therefore never truly alone. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind and help you adapt to new communication considerations in your relationships.

1. Communicate about communication

Some people love constant texting and instant messaging and have an easy facility for this type of communication. Others find it difficult to integrate into their lives, and would prefer to use it just to make plans and leave the talking for when they're face-to-face with their partner. Sometimes, these differences are left unsaid, and people who love to text feel ignored when the person they're involved with doesn't always respond, and people who like to keep things short end up feeling under pressure to constantly engage and respond. Being up front about what kinds of e-communication expectations you have could save both of you resentment and misunderstanding.

2. Balance screen time with time spent face-to-face

As much fun as it might be to send flirty and romantic messages and pictures, email links to an article you think they might like, or post a cute video on social media, it remains important to spend time together in person. This means setting aside time when you'll go for a walk, cook dinner together, or spend a Sunday morning in bed. Screen-time is great, but for relationships to feel well rounded it needs to be balanced with time spent with your partner in real time and space.

3. Unplug sometimes

With smartphones as the new norm, we are available at all hours to be in contact with the outside world. This means time with our partner can be disrupted by a work email, a text message from a friend, or event invites on Facebook. There are times when this is completely appropriate - after all, it's the new normal - but it can be great when you're with your partner for both of you to turn off your devices from time to time and just be together without the possibility of interruption.

4. Spend time truly alone

Similar to the suggestion above, it can be important for people to maintain time that is quiet and really alone, independent of their partner or their other friends. With constant reachability, it can be hard for people to ever feel like they have alone time, which is integral to maintaining a healthy sense of self. This means that it can be great to leave your phone at home sometimes, or switch it onto airplane mode for a few hours a day and just be with yourself. When you spend healthy time alone you're actually more available for your partner in the long run.

5. Always respond

As much as people have different relationships to technology or preferences around how much, how, and when to use it, the reality is, these technologies are here to stay. A piece of common sense, bottom line wisdom, is when it comes to your romantic relationship; *always* send a response to your partner. It doesn't need to be immediate, and it can take the form of "I'll get back to you soon", but hearing nothing from someone you're involved with can lead to feelings of anxiety and pain. So, no matter how you do it, ensure you do it.

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