

NSLAP WELLNESS TIP: Technology and relationships

The following is an article excerpt from Homewood Human Solutions™, your health and wellness provider.

The digital revolution has given us new tools to meet people and stay in touch. It's also changed the way we relate to each other – at home and at work.

Cell phones, smartphones, email, tablets, Skype, Facebook, Twitter and a wide range of other tools provide us with immediate and constant access to friends, family and coworkers. But fewer and fewer people are using these tools to actually talk to each other. Instead, they are texting, emailing, posting, tweeting and instant messaging. For more and more of us, technology may actually be damaging our relationships with others.

In a virtual world

Many relationships today play out in cyberspace. Want to meet your soul mate? Sign on to an online dating site. Want to spice up your love life? Sext your partner. Need to dump your boyfriend? Send him a text. Want to let your friends know you're single again? Change your status on Facebook.

If you feel as if everyone around you is glued to an electronic device these days, you're not far from the truth. Consider these statistics from the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association:

- In 2011, a total of 78 billion text messages were sent - an increase from 56.4 billion in 2010.
- Currently, more than 200 million text messages are sent in Canada each day (which equates to more than 2,500 texts per second!)

Text messaging remains the dominant method of instant communication, especially for teens. A recent study by the Journal of Information Technology found that "Cell phones and computers have become essential to the average teenager's social life, and the average teen spends four hours per day with some sort of device ... people age 14 to 29 would rather give up their relationship partner than their cell phone – by a 2-to-1 margin."

In the blink of an eye

E-mailing, posting, tweeting, instant messaging and texting eliminate eye contact, posture, vocal nuances and other physical and audio cues people rely on when building trust and establishing social relationships. This non-verbal communication represents up to 40 percent of our in-person communication, allowing us to tell how others are feeling by their facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice. The ability to understand and use non-verbal communication is a powerful tool in helping connect with others, express what we really mean, navigate challenging personal situations, and build trust.

Dnt think we r wrking out. C U L8r

Electronic media can also make confronting people less stressful – but that can also cause problems. Confronting someone is never pleasant and most of us think twice before doing so. Unfortunately, emails, tweets, posts, IM, texts and truncated text language make it much easier to send hurtful or inappropriate comments, making a contentious issue much worse.

- **Do think twice before posting anything online.** Keep in mind that what happens on the Internet STAYS on the Internet. Forever. So think twice before posting comments, photographs or other material online. You never know who is – or will be – checking you out.

- **Do make time for regular, old-fashioned, face-to-face meetings at work and at home.** If you can't meet in person, pick up the phone. Request time with your manager to sit down together and discuss upcoming projects.
- **Do listen.** Active listening and eye contact are impossible when your phone is constantly beeping, pinging or ringing. When you go to lunch with friend or romantic partner, turn your cell phone off and focus on the conversation.
- **Don't ever send an email, post a comment or tweet an opinion in anger.** If using email, save to draft and revisit it the next day. Chances are you'll delete it.
- **Do proofread.** Never before has clear, concise writing been so important and never before have proofreading and a slow hand to click that send button been so important.
- **Don't use technology to deal with complicated or sensitive relationship problems.** Type is devoid of emotion or clues to emotion, and can make matters worse. Face-to-face discussions may be more difficult, but ultimately you're more likely to resolve the problem.

Finally, remember that technology and social media are meant to complement our relationships, not be a substitute for them. Spending too much time connecting with people electronically can leave you feeling more isolated. For assistance with these challenges, give us a call to speak with a counsellor or coach about meeting your goals.

*For additional information, support, resources and counseling on health and wellness, visit the NSLAP website at www.nslap.ca. Please note that **NSLAP** is your "company" name when you register. When you call the NSLAP number at **1-866-299-1299**, (Français: 1-866-398-9505; TTY: 1-888-384-1152) Your call will be answered any time, day or night, 365 days per year.*