

WATCH HOW WE SCREEN

IT CAN CREATE DETACHMENT ISSUES IN RELATIONSHIPS AND SET BAD EXAMPLES FOR OUR CHILDREN. SO, HOW DO WE MONITOR OURSELVES?

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I was so thrilled to realise there is a Safer Internet Day each year which falls on this Tuesday, February 5. Not a week goes by when cyber-related challenges aren't raised in the counselling room.

Safer Internet Day's mission is to promote the safe and responsible use of technology for young people. What a great day.

In my experience, the most common areas for concern discussed in counselling are:

- Frequent late-night use of the internet.
- Addictive games and related conversations with people unknown to partners.
- Obsessive protection of phones that never leave their side.
- Lack of attention to children's hours spent online that causes aggression or moodiness.

If you have children, there are some great online safety quizzes to check their understanding around sharing their images, giving out their information and what to do about online bullying.

It could save their life.

I totally love that we've become even more connected, thanks to technology.

Long-distance relationships are enhanced with it and those living or travelling abroad feel closer than ever.

In day-to-day life, however, screens are often an unwanted third person in the relationship.

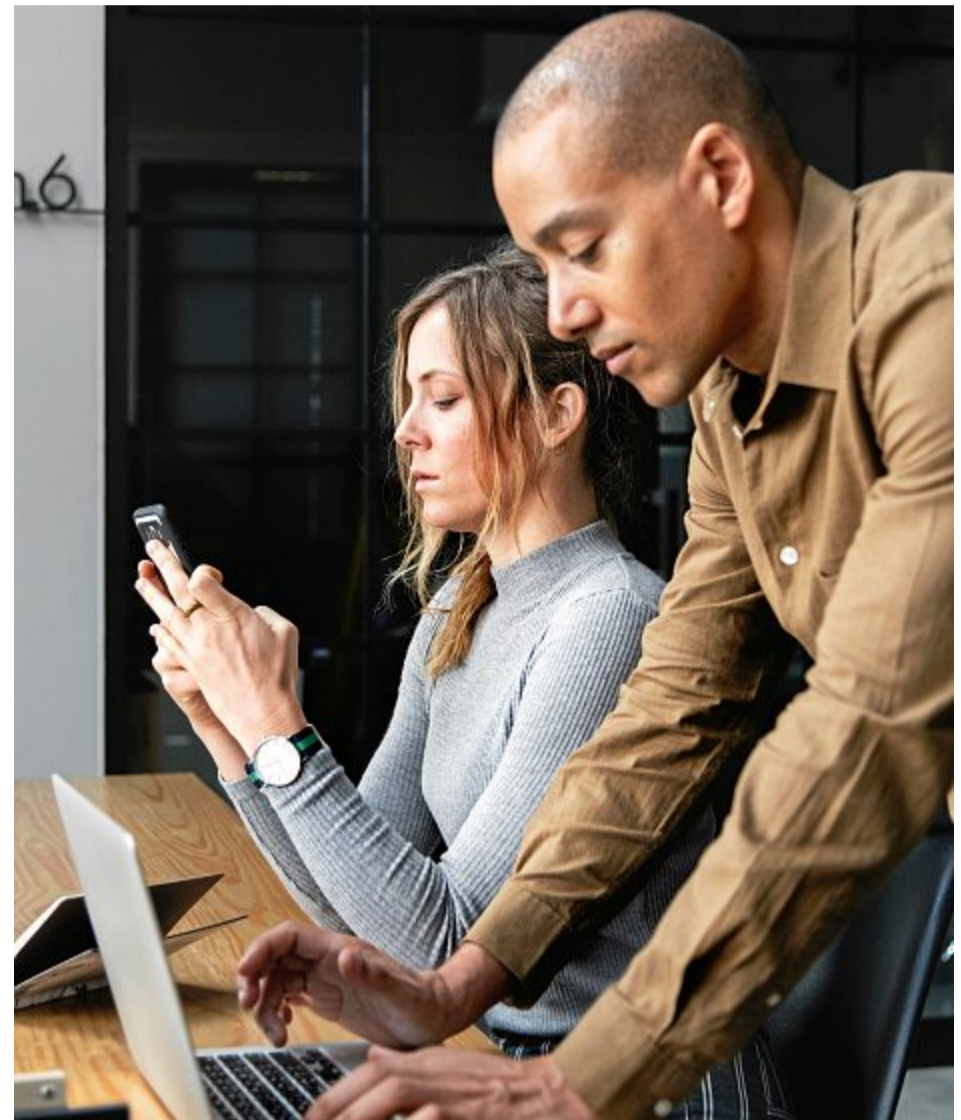
When both partners are screen-addicted, it's some sort of crazy foursome where the only real connection is the charging port that sustains this unhealthy attachment.

It's not just our children with whom we need to have sensible discussions.

We also need to communicate with our partners.

Here are some topics to ask each other:

- What do we perceive is a reasonable amount of screen time per day?
- Can we incorporate a fun challenge with an incentive to reduce it? (Many devices have in-built time tracking to keep you informed.)
- Do we set a good example for screen usage etiquette for children? (That is, putting down your screen, engaging with emotional attentiveness and eye contact or keeping devices away from the dinner table.)
- Do we share new interests apps or games with each other?
- What apps, websites, podcasts or blogs can we both use to enrich our relationship? A great example is the Gottman Card Decks app for couples.
- Do we feel comfortable leaving our phone unattended and face up around our partner?
- Are we comfortable to be online friends with ex-partners, old school friends or new acquaintances of the opposite sex?
- Who do we agree is acceptable for us to chat to online?
- Have we ever gifted money to a cause, a person or organisation and not told each other?
- Do we have a no-screen zone in our house or timeframes when we converse real time in the flesh?
- Do we agree with what each other posts



on social media sites?

Enjoy the wonders of technology to be entertained, organised and informed, but if you're withholding information from your partner about your screen use, it's your red flag.

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