

Building a marriage in a digital world

Ever felt like you're connected online...but not really to each other? Here are a few tips on staying connected to each other.

Building a strong marriage in a digital world is a skill most of us are learning on the job!

Digital technology has become increasingly woven into the fabric of our most intimate relationships, and as we navigate an online culture together our gadgetry can be a real help – or even at times – a definite hindrance.

So how do we deal positively with the presence of digital technology in our marriage, and what do we need to watch out for?

Stay connected

If we use our digital resources positively, they can actually enhance and not hinder our relationship.

- Try to send regular messages of encouragement to each other. Kind words are a simple but powerful way of showing we care.
- Celebrate shared milestones on social media. Learning to cheer each other on publicly as well as privately can be a great support.
- If working away, platforms like Skype are a great way to keep your marriage connected and see and hear each other for free.
- Investigate useful tools such as shared calendars, budget plans, to-do lists, alerts for significant dates and wish lists. These can save valuable time and help to avoid double booking or forgetting those oh-so-important details.

Reboot the system

Like all things in life, we need good boundaries and communication for technology to play a positive role in our

marriage. Every new app or device we bring into our lives has the potential to distract us from what matters most. Sometimes we need to reboot our expectations to ensure that our habits are healthy rather than a cause of digital strife.

- Try not to make assumptions about what your spouse is doing online. You may think they are playing Candy Crush *again*, but they might be researching new life insurance policies or a trip to Paris. (Anything's possible!)
- Talk about screen and email boundaries. When are you not 'at work'? Should meals be phone-free times? Should two nights a week be offline? Could the TV get rejected in favour of conversation at certain times? Should the bedroom remain a gadget-free zone?
- Identify screen-time that you can enjoy together. Maybe you like to regularly watch a particular box set series or surf the Internet for holidays or days out.
- It's good to agree together what you will and won't share on social media. Discuss sharing passwords so that trust and transparency are maintained.
- Consider disabling your notification alerts so that your phone and your laptop are not constantly pinging for attention. Decide how often to check your updates rather than allowing your time to be continually disrupted.

Unplug for safety

Although we all enjoy the benefits of technology, we also all have the potential to slip, a click at a time, into a private world of self-gratification, secrecy or even addiction. When we realise we are in danger, it takes courage and honesty to unplug, to reassess and to get help where necessary.

- Do you have conversations on



Facebook or other sites that you withhold from your spouse? Are they less innocent than you are telling yourself they are? If so, step away from the keyboard and, if necessary, suspend your account.

- Do you get absorbed into hours of gaming, online shopping or gambling to the detriment of others around you? Is your spouse often asking you to step away from the computer? Try a month away from the game or site, and take steps to create healthy boundaries around your time and money.
- Are you watching pornography? How can you make sure that what you are watching alone is helpful to your relationship? Would it help if you shared the same bedtime with your spouse?

Technology is here to stay. It is on the sofa with us, on our desk at work and alongside us as we display every Instagram-friendly moment to friends near and far. So it makes sense for us to reflect upon how our digital life infiltrates our most precious relationships for better or worse.

After all, a marriage will only ever thrive when given the time and attention it needs – both inside and outside the Wi-Fi zone.

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Care for the Family's aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties.

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