

Are Smartphone Damaging Your Relationship?

**I'M HAVING PEOPLE
OVER TO STARE AT
THEIR PHONES LATER
IF YOU WANT TO COME
BY...**

Smartphone usage is becoming an addiction for many people. So much so that there is now a term for it "Nomophobia" which is the fear of being without a mobile device or out of mobile contact. *The addiction exists because of the reinforcing effect of smartphone usage.* Compulsive dependence on smartphones appears to deliver a dopamine hit for the brain and dopamine is closely connected to the motivation-reward parts of the brain.

A pleasing text, a social update or a like on one of our posts make us feel good about ourselves. We feel a sense

of achievement and validation. We need more of these feelings, and our phones offer endless possibilities to trigger a dopamine release.

We call our phones our connection to the world. In reality, they skew our connection to the world by making us focus more on the people who are not present rather than those who are present with us. Our interpersonal connections with those close to us are hijacked by the desire to connect to the world around us through our electronic devices.

Recent studies by Andrew K. Przybylski and Netta Weinstein of the University of Essex show the impact phones have in our close relationships. We don't even have to be using them at the time. As long as they're sitting in sight, the effect exists.

This effect is not noticed when the conversation with someone you are with is casual however if the conversation is meaningful the presence of a phone causes a decrease in the relationship quality. **The study showed that couples were reporting less trust and thought that there was less empathy shown by their partners if a phone was present.**

Studies done in the past indicate that because of the many options that phones present us with our attention is quickly diverted from what is going on around us. *New research suggests that our phone represents to us the wider network to which we can connect. Unfortunately, this results in an inhibition of our ability to connect with the people physically around us.*

It is also shown that higher levels of technology are associated with relationship conflict and produce lower relationship satisfaction. It is also believed that high technology use reduces people's satisfaction with life in general and leads to depression.

When we pay more attention to our phone than our partner, it becomes like rejection in our partner's eyes. It screams the message that you're more interested in your phone than them, and they're simply not worthy of your attention.

Rejection on whatever level it occurs tends to be painful. Hurt feelings result in the mood dropping, and you start to question your self-esteem. Over time anger and resentment result. No wonder the relationship satisfaction drops and depression increases.

It is common to believe that being momentarily distracted by your cell phone is not an issue but findings suggest that the more often this occurs when you are with your partner, the less likely it is that your partner is satisfied with the overall relationship.

Modern life supports the use of smart phones. Nobody is suggesting that we should stop using them. It's not about trying to wind your life back to a pre-electronics era. It is however about finding a solution to work with what we have now.

Resolving the conflict

- Sit down with your partner and determine to what extent the use of smart phones is impacting your relationship. Do this with the understanding that at times using a smartphone is essential.
- Work out what is essential use and what is use that is merely distracting from and affecting the relationship
- Next address the concept of a balance between what is essential in regards to your phones and what is needed to strengthen your relationship. Non-essential use of the telephone at times when we should be interacting with our partners damages the relationship. So work out what is an appropriate way of managing the non-essential use of the phone.
- Determine where there are areas and times where phones need to be put away and not used. For instance, the bedroom and after a certain time at night.

Always ensure that there are contingency plans when emergencies arise that might need the phone to have priority over the relationship. For example, having a family member in the hospital means that you need to be always contactable.

(c) Tracey Janke – Startpoint Counselling 2017 – Relationship Specialist 07 3458 1725