

Caught in the net

Most stable modern relationships work best when they are between two committed people. But in the 21st century, some couples find there is a third “person” in the relationship, the computer. It comes as a package deal with its partner, the internet.

The danger of computers and the internet tends to be based on how much they are used. Like many habits, they are addictive.

If you think your partner is developing a computer addiction, try the test of asking them to go for two nights without the computer.

The reasons for spending time on the computer might be innocent: finishing some work, sending emails, buying and selling on eBay.

But if the amount of time spent on these activities is more than that spent interacting with a partner, it may lead to relationship problems. The good news is that it's relatively easy to fix, once you are aware of it.

It simply means making the effort to reconnect with your partner and make sure you increase the amount of couple time you have.

The more insidious side of computer use is when people devote more time to exploring pornography sites than their intimate communication with their partners.

It's impossible for a real-life partner to compete with sexual fantasies dreamed up and presented with airbrushing on the internet.

A lot of time spent viewing these sites can give people an unrealistic picture of how life should be.

Partners of internet pornography addicts can feel unloved, hopeless and worthless if they are compared with what is available online.

Chat rooms are another danger area. It is easy to appear seductive and interesting when you only have to reveal what you want to about yourself.

And there is a danger when the person you meet in a chat room suddenly becomes more desirable than the one you have committed to in real life.

Once this becomes an issue you should be seeing flashing danger signs for your real-life relationship, and you need to get some professional help.

So for the good of your continuing relationship, monitor internet use and don't let it take the place of the face-to-face personal interaction that has kept the human race going for thousands of years.

Survival tips

- **To test a computer addiction, try going without it in your leisure time for two days**
- **Check if your partner is spending more time on the computer than face-to-face interaction with you**
- **If your partner is accessing internet pornography to the detriment of your relationship get some professional help before it's too late.**