

V-day gift tip: Put down the smartphone



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Looking for something special to give your loved one on Valentine's Day? The best gift could be a promise to turn off your smartphone a little more often.

Registered marriage and family therapist Anna Toth said it has become common for couples to express concerns to her about their partner texting and using social media.

"Mostly what people are saying is it's the amount of time spent in those activities," Toth said.

"Sometimes it's around the content of what's being posted. (The information) might be too exposing or revealing about what's going on in a marriage or couple's relationship."

Psychologist Kenya Thompson-Leonardelli added that social networking sites are also amplifying classic relationships issues, such as personal boundaries, trust and jealousy, by providing greater possibilities for contact and more information for couples to agonize over.

"It used to be that a person could wonder where his or her partner was on a Friday night. Now they are wondering what their partner is doing when they text them at 9:30 p.m. after having seen a picture posted at 9:15 p.m. on the person's Facebook page of them at a bar," she said.

But the best way to curb issues relating to social media sites, according to Aida Seetner, a registered marriage and family therapist, is to put energy into maintaining a solid relationship.

Couples have to keep working on their connection, she said. It's important to have trust and to communicate with each other openly and honestly. She suggested that pairs spend a minimum of 15 minutes everyday speaking intimately with each other.

"Which means not talking about business items but checking in with a person on exactly how he or she is feeling. And what they have experienced on an emotional level throughout the day," Seetner said.

It's also important for couples to lay down rules on social media use and texting from the start, Thompson-Leonardelli said. Couples should discuss what each is comfortable sharing online and how they feel about the other adding exes to Facebook or Twitter, she said.

Also, it can be good to discuss expectations on when and how often couples want to be in contact with each other so they are on the same page. Otherwise, conflict may arise.

"I think that romantic relationships with a solid base are more likely to have better face-to-face communication, more of a sense of agreement about how they are going to use social media," she said.

However, if after all this one partner is still constantly trying to find the 'hidden' meanings in the other's tweets or Facebook posts, maybe what that person really should be figuring out is why they're so worried, Toth suggested.

If someone has fears of being rejected, abandoned or humiliated it wouldn't matter whether their partner has a friend or was chatting to someone on social networking sites it's going to be bothersome to them, Toth said. So they need to address those issues, she added.

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