SWIMMING IN CYBER
Learning to live HEALTHILY in the intersections of the virtual and real worlds

Dr. Bruce Ballon, M.D.
This book is dedicated to Anna, Sofia and Simone,
My anchors to meaningful reality
"We need not to be let alone. We need to be really bothered once in a while. How long is it since you were really bothered? About something important, about something real?"

— Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451

"There will come a time when it isn't 'They're spying on me through my phone' anymore. Eventually, it will be 'My phone is spying on me'."

— Philip K. Dick

"Before you become too entranced with gorgeous gadgets and mesmerizing video displays, let me remind you that information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom, and wisdom is not foresight. Each grows out of the other, and we need them all."

— Arthur C. Clarke
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION: Dipping in the toe...**
- WHAT is this book about?
- WHO is this book for?
- WHERE does the work get done?
- HOW will it help?
- WHY did I write this book?
- WHEN do you start?

1. **REFLECTION ON THE WAVES: Personal connections to the cyberworld**
   - The reflection on the Cyber Surface
   - Technology is here to stay
   - Take the quiz!
   - The world we live in today
   - Setting guidelines
   - Fear of technology advancement or real threat to society?

   *Interlude: The Waters of Cyberspace*

2. **WADING IN: How Important are your connections?**
   - Let's talk about connection
   - Where do you stand with technology?
   - Where did the time go?
   - 21st Century Dinner Pastiche
   - The reality of 21st-Century communication and our new virtual landscape
   - "Santa's Cyber Health List"

   *Interlude: Riding WWW-Waves!*

3. **TSUNAMI! Information overload**
   - Overload defined
   - Information is not always true
   - A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing
   - Where do you stand?
   - What's the big deal?
4. A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT: Real impact of virtual worlds
   * Where are we heading?
   * Finances
   * Emotional Hazards
   * Social and Ethical Dangers - Video Games
   * Physical Danger
   * Sample Family Guidelines

5. CAPSIZED: When is "it" a problem? Is this an... "Addiction"?
   * Addiction
   * Over-reliance?
   * What drives "Addictive" Behaviours?
   * Words and labels
   * What is addiction?

6. BRAIN WAVES & MIND CURRENTS: Neurobiology and Mental Health
   * Waves of the grey
   * Currents of the mind

7. MIRAGE AT SEA: Simulation and games
   * Virtual impact
   * Stereotypes and video games
   * Statistically thinking
   * The myth that Blowing things up is good for you
   * Physical consequences of gaming "addictions"
   * Video Game Ratings

8. GATHERING SHELLS: Cyber shopping
   * Is it the spending?
   * The thrill of the win
   * Some possible motivations
Interlude: Swimming Techniques II

9. CLIFF DIVING: Gambling and the cyberworld
   * Internet gambling
   * Alarming numbers are eye openers
   * Problems compounding problems
   * Are there such things as online gambling predictors?
   * Example: When Gambling, Gaming, Simulation and Apps Meet!
   * Where did all the youth gamblers go?

Interlude: Chlorine & Other Disinfectants

10. NAUTICAL STREAMS: Sex & pornography
    * By the numbers
    * Texting/Computer Lingo Cheat Sheet
    * Sadly, now commonplace: Sexting
    * Impact on body image and relationships

Interlude: Get a Cyber Swimming Buddy

11. BEACH CYBER-SAND KICKERS: Cyber-Bullying & Cyber-Stalking
    * Another potential negative aspect of connectivity
    * Are you stalking me?
    * Don't fall asleep on the job - maintain awareness!
    * Do you know a Cyber Bully?
    * The child who changed
    * It's a new day entirely
    * Stop! Read the signs
    * Confronting Cyber Bullying
    * STOP SPYING ON ME MOM/DAD!!!!

Interlude: Swimming Aids

12. SWIM SMART: Healthy relationships between humans & technology
    * Tips and tools for self-reflection
    * Basic limit setting guide
    * A self-contract
    * Family contracting
    * Setting virtual boundaries
    * Using cyber connections for getting physically healthy
Interlude: Out to Sea

13. LIFEGUARDING: External help

* The ramifications of behavioural problems
* Involving family and/or significant others
* Professional help

EPILOGUE: Back to shore

RESOURCES LINKS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

THANK YOU FOR READING!
INTRODUCTION: DIPPING IN THE TOE...

WHAT is this book about?

Even at this starting point I am sure you are asking the legitimate question: Just what is this book about?

My goal is to use the pages of this book to inform and guide readers how to develop a healthy relationship with the so-called 'virtual worlds' in which we reside in today's society. Among these worlds are wireless communications, interactive platforms, tsunamis of information, fictional simulated worlds - realities in which millions of people around the world co-exist simultaneously in their daily lives. I have included tools such as reflection, exercises / actions and resources to help you deal effectively with this ever-expanding issue.

The Internet and the cyber-connected worlds can be seen as open waters more than a closed controlled pool. In a pool, a lifeguard is often nearby and the area is controlled and contained. The Internet is not like swimming in a pool at all; it is more like diving into open water. Even with net tools, "net-nannies" and similar limit setting devices, it is easy to find links and lures to other areas of the Net, allowing unsuspecting leisure swimmers to be swept up by cyber waves into unknown and sometimes risky waters. There are many technological portals to this world, ranging from smart phones, cyber watches, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers. The sometimes calm surface of the Internet is often linked to darker sites that are often just a click away. Some people are oblivious to the potential implications and dangers that exist in some patches of cyberspace.

Like shark-infested waters, there may be cyber scammers, predators and pornography snares. Some people become so anxious about these potential dangers that they avoid using the Net, which is not realistic in the 21st century. The key to navigating the Net is not to avoid it completely but to tread carefully. It is therefore important to learn how to have a healthy relationship with cyberspace by developing vigorous strokes to keep afloat and prevent drowning in the cyber waves. This book will give you the knowledge, skills and attitudes to do that.

WHO is this book for?

You might wonder if this book is for you. As I wrote this book I had specific target audiences in mind:

-**PARENTS:** Raising children in the 21st century, surrounded and invaded on all sides by cyber tech, is not simple. The landscape of parenting has changed over the decades. There is still the need for concern with issues such as safety, nutrition and education. As if those concerns are not enough, today's parents worry (as they should) about their children's activities in the use of the newest technology. The reality is that many adults in our world have no idea how to develop their own healthy relationship with today's high tech technology; their focus is to get whatever job or task completed without
crashing their computer or zapping their mobile devices. It is our responsibility to be role models for the next generation. In reality, many adults have similar or even more serious problems managing their screen time, quick communications, and general healthy boundaries than younger users. The rampant growth of cyber technology influences our family and community values. Parents can help motivate their children, assist in ways to foster independence, and ensure that the family has a common understanding of particular issues they wish to tackle. The key is for parents to become aware of the current state of affairs, educate themselves on key issues, and take proactive steps to help the entire family develop a healthy way of interacting with cyber worlds.

**THE WHOLE FAMILY**: Do not think that that only the young can develop unhealthy behaviours with cyber activities. You could know a senior who has just been handed a tablet device and is now being bombarded by scam ads. You could be the son or daughter of that senior who needs to help educate your parent on this! You might be the youthful grandson or granddaughter who people worry is spending too much time on the computer - and need to show your family your own use is healthy: you might need to be the one to teach them about current cyber issues, netiquette, and more. The information here can also be used by entire families to read and reflect together to work as a unit in developing your own family values in interacting with the virtual and wireless worlds.

**TEACHERS**: The material in this book, although aimed at families, is also presented for discussion in educational institutions. Each section deals with a specific theme, with reflective exercises that can be adapted to different learner groups. Also, it may raise questions of Internet use rules for various educational settings, e.g. the reason why a school does or does not allow smartphone use during recess. What policy is there for using tablets/laptops/phones during meetings? I believe this book will help illuminate these issues and promote discussions for teachers and parents for helping create healthy guidelines for the use of technology.

**IN CASE YOU ARE NOT ONE OF THE ABOVE**: You do not need to be a parent or a teacher to apply many of the concepts to your own life to consider the nature and extent of your relationship between the physical and virtual worlds. We are all potentially vulnerable to many of the lures lurking in the depths of the cyber. The important thing is learning about what they are, reflecting on your own behaviours, and maintaining a healthy dynamic balance in your life. This book is helpful for everyone who accesses various devices that allow connection to cyberspace.

**WHERE does the work get done?**

Most of the work will be in your own head - reflecting on the numerous questions I will pose to you. You'll find tools and techniques provided in the latter part of the book. However, to use them most effectively, you really do need to take the time to spend delving into your own mind to come to terms with your own relationship
with the cyber world. Once you have a handle on this, taking action in the physical world will be much more effective, setting the guidelines for your personal, family, work and other life domains.

Just providing a cookbook of "do this and that" does not work for many people. Thoughts on how to make it custom fit to your own situation, the mental practice, and reflection on the impact of changes you make, all increase the chances of successfully developing healthy patterns. For example, most of us had to take swimming lessons to traverse a pool without drowning: a great technique for a breaststroke was not something we are born with!

You will find reflective exercises throughout the book:

- Numerous non-rhetorical questions in the body of each section to help personalize the material to your own situation.
- At the end of each section you'll find tips that help with practical application of the content in the physical world.
- Various swimming in cyber concepts and tips between sections.
- Plus other exercises with some twists to keep you on your toes.

**HOW will it help?**

This book will cover key areas of interacting with the cyber world and show the reader how to make the healthiest, safest choices in their own relationship with technology. The book will guide you to reflect on your personal interaction and take action that will lead to development and maintenance of a healthy relationship with cyber tools and interfaces. With this empowerment, your children can be taught to do the same through your guidance, example and the positive changes they see in you once you have consciously taken control of your own cyber habits.

Imagine finally purging all the junk emails you are subscribed to; building a cyber-free zone; learning to set virtual limits to deal with the never ending flow of communications; and much more.

**WHY did I write this book?**

If you are curious about me, you can read more about my background at the end of the book. I will say I am a psychiatrist who has been helping individuals and their families with addiction issues for over two decades. I started specific programs based on best practice principles to better serve the complex needs of these people. I also realized I needed to continually educate myself as well as my fellow healthcare providers with the nuances and issues regarding addiction.

I started to help families deal with cyber issues when I ran a youth addiction and mental health program. We frequently had calls from parents that wanted help for their children they described as being "addicted" to videogames. Although there was no mandate or funding for this, I eventually managed to open a "virtual" door to allow these families access to help. My personal and professional mandate is to help build the case that these issues should be recognized and included in
healthcare programs to allow proper support and treatment for those dealing with cyber behavioural concerns.

I am a big proponent of prevention and early intervention. So, I decided to write this book to help share my opinions on forming healthy cyber use. You need not have developed a full-blown issue to make use of what is in these pages. I hope you can use the approaches and tools so you never do develop a problem!

The material in this book is a combination of my personal experiences helping individuals, groups and families come to grips with the problems associated with cyberspace. Also included is research and references from various sources to help support some approaches and expand on certain points. However, as I authored this book, I came to realize that the real key is that common sense always seems to prevail; the classic approaches to self-awareness, self-care, healthy relationship factors, mental and physical health maintenance, and so on have not gone out of style - even with the scientific wizardry of the 21st century.

Some themes in this book will keep recurring, as there are more similarities than differences between the behaviours and approaches that will be discussed. Think of it as any good swimmer would when doing laps - practice with repetition will help with retention of the knowledge, skills and values so they have more of a chance of "sticking" with you - endurance to stay on course. Also, I know some like to leap to certain sections of a book and skip others; many of the subjects discussed later in the book are based on material discussed earlier in the book.

My goal is to provide breadth and adequate depth of content for you to reflect on the material and motivate you to take action in your own development of a healthy relationship with the cyber world.

**WHEN do you start?**

NOW.

If not now, when?
Part 1

**REFLECTION ON THE WAVES: Personal connections to the cyberworld**

This section covers the following topics:

- The importance of self-reflection on your behaviours with cyber technology
- Appreciating the merging of the virtual and physical worlds in the 21st century
- Accepting the importance of developing personal and public healthy use of technology

**The Reflection on the Cyber Surface**

Now, let us look at the huge "ocean" known as cyberspace. As you look, you may catch a reflection of yourself. This is the first step to mastering the concepts and techniques in this book. You need to know what is happening in a true and honest way within yourself to know if you are having a healthy relationship and swimming along in the cyber...or in danger of drowning. Are you scared, hesitant, ambivalent, or confident about submerging and emerging into the Net? I am a big believer in reflective practice. In other words, taking time to reflect deeply about what you think and feel regarding your interactions with 21st century technology. Otherwise, how do you really know, based on your interactions with the cyber world, if you are doing well, not so well, or perhaps need some radical change...maybe even calling out to someone to throw you a life preserver! Sometimes we all need a helping hand to get untangled from the "Net." Regardless, let us now dive further into the book!

**Technology is here to stay**

Twenty-first century technology and communications have swept our society into new ways of inter-relating across work, leisure and school contexts. A virtual world co-exists with what we call "physical" reality. Actually, in some ways, many consider the virtual more important than the "real" world - or don't distinguish one from the other.

Although this modern communication technology has helped people connect in new and quicker ways, many unexpected consequences and dangers have developed from its use. These consequences affect not only youth but people of all ages around the globe.

A major problem is that there are no real validated guidelines yet established and accepted for healthy cyber world interactions. We intuit it and make suggestions. There are emerging concepts based on common sense, determinants to health, and applying how we helped others with behaviour issues that have already been established for other situations. However, every human being is unique (like
YOU) so we each need to understand ourselves in order to apply principles with a customized approach in practical ways to deal with the cyber world.

From my perspective, the messages and values inherent in the cyber world have been unchecked and bombard people in a more intense way than television ever could. None of us are immune to the potential of its influence, which has the potential to shape and/or distort moral, ethical, family and cultural values. Without an awareness of these trappings, changes can sneak, like a thief in the night, into your very existence and steal some of the things most precious to you and your family - a prime example being meaningful time connecting with your loved ones.

At this point I ask with all sincerity for you to consider this question: Have maybe even you been affected to an unhealthy degree?

It may be tempting to answer 'yes' or 'no' quickly, based upon what you feel may be the correct answer. But the fact is that it is almost impossible to answer this question without reflecting on your unique situation. I really want you to learn how to reflect deeply. It is one of the only ways to actually clearly consider what you are doing and then think of what you might want to change and what you need to keep doing.

For example, do you notice many people often say, "I Googled it!" instead of "I used a search engine!"? In short, many are using a brand identity as a verb in daily conversation. Do you wonder how many minds have been influenced and "branded" by the brands of international corporate entities? This underscores the importance of taking time to perform self-reflection to find what messages the media has implanted in our minds.

Before talking to others about how to deal with these issues (like a loved one you may be concerned about) I recommend you listen to yourself first, check your own activities, and begin a process of making sure you can become a role model for healthy relationships with the cyber world. If you are a parent, you already know that children can be critical (of you and everything you do) and are very observant. Keep in mind that you are working toward teaching your children family values, so it is imperative that you also show by example as well as what you say. For instance, are your thumbs busy with texting during times when you are communicating with your family/friends/co-workers?

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**Take the Quiz!**

Please take the following YES / NO quiz I whipped up to get you to reflect! (And no, it is not statistically valid or reliable - but it is an engaging way to jump-start your self-reflection - if you answer honestly.) When you’re done, total your score to get an idea of where you are and what should be the next steps in your journey.

1) Do you answer e-mails after work hours?
2) Do you answer e-mails after 10 PM?
3) Do you own a smart phone like an iPhone™, Android™ or Blackberry™?
4) Do you ever turn off your portable communication device?
5) Do you gamble, game or play on the net?
6) Do you communicate with your friends and family primarily over the net?
7) Do you ever shop on-line?
8) Do you date on-line?
9) Do you Google your own name?
10) Do you Google other people?
11) Do you belong to any Internet forums, chat rooms, or similar?
12) Do you walk around with a Bluetooth™ ear-set when not driving?
13) Do you feel compelled to answer audible e-mail notifications via computer or smart phone ASAP?
14) If you have no access to the Internet due to a system outage or similar, do you feel symptoms of separation anxiety, i.e. as if you have lost one of your senses (or your mind)?
15) Does your personal (non-work) data plans, Internet access, and other cyber-communication activities cost you $350+ a month?
16) Do you ever download music or movies?
17) Have you understood every term I have used in the previous 16 questions without Googling?
18) Did you count how many times I used Google and Googling?

**SCORE: Add up the number of YES answers**

0-5: You are free of the "Matrix". Most people in major urban centres likely think you a bit odd! However, does this non-connection to cyberspace sometimes hinder you in certain ways?
6-9: Welcome to the Global Village where the Media is the Message - or is it?
10-13: Road Warrior of the Information Highway
14-17: You may need to reflect on your own use of games and Internet use before you can approach credibly dealing with others with similar issues - and not be called out on it.
18: You may be part Borg

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**The world we live in today**

Chances are you know somebody who you think is "addicted" to the Internet. Or at least you suspect they are "addicted." It seems that wherever we walk, people are on their iPods™, tablets and smartphones. Technology develops so quickly; I wonder if you remember we had PDA's (Personal Digital Assistant) for just a blink of an eye before smartphones appeared on the scene. We're constantly
texting, blogging, and tweeting our way through life. I wonder what your experience is like right now. If you are attempting to read this as a physical book... can you stick with it? Are you now used to viewing text on a Kindle™ or equivalent? There is nothing wrong with reading this book on that device or similar - I just want you to reflect on your actions.

Our society has helped fuel our need for constant "hits" of action and stimuli. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily a good thing.

Whether it's a laptop, desktop, tablet (or you name it), many in our society have access to technology 24/7. When does such usage become excessive or harmful? When does too much become overuse? Then again, how do we deal with it?

Even in developing countries or impoverished areas in industrial ones, some charitable efforts aim to provide technology to youth and families - but without guidance how to use it in a healthy way.

Our unhealthy use of modern technology and the internet for communications is not limited by age, socioeconomics, demographics, or culture. The Baby Boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1961) and Generation X (born between 1966 and 1976) sees most every young person in the household walking around with their noses buried in their brand name smartphones and say, "Can't we get through dinner or a single conversation without someone having to stop and check an incoming message?" But here is food for thought: Would the older adult have the same reaction if their young person upgraded to a newer version and gave them the older model? Would this exchange result in the entire household existing with their noses buried in the cyber realms?

Generation Y (also known as the Millennials or Echo Boomers) is defined as those born between 1998 and 2006. This generation is literally growing up in the computer age, with its rapid advances in communications technology and the Internet. This generation, more than any other, is hands-on when it comes to digital communication devices. Even elementary school children have their own cell phones, which have the capability to connect them to the entire wireless world!

Try to find one high school or college student that doesn't have a smartphone or some type of digital media in a pocket, backpack, or in their hands in our western society. If such a student exists he or she is either a.) in a state of panic because they lost their phone, b.) a victim of a recent mugging, or c.) walking to a store to buy one. Well, in all fairness, there are some people without this technology because of socioeconomic status and/or geographical locale - and yet I've seen people in states of poverty prioritize their smartphones over food.

Generation Z, those who will come of age between 2013 and 2020, are among the most highly sophisticated computer and media users to date. Their Internet savvy, ability to text at dazzling speeds, and the broad use of social media defines the entire generation and serves to meet most of their communication needs. It will be interesting to see the impact on their brain development and
social skills, as the dominant use of technology has never been witnessed in a generation before.

Why Z by the way? I sometimes think it may stand for ZOMBIE. I found out that a zombie app is an example of the zombification of people stuck on their tech device. Imagine, for instance, a camera on a phone that can be used as the screen background of the person that is texting. This would mean that the user never has to look up - they are viewing the world through the screen of the phone and "multitasking" as they shuffle about. We'll get more into that as well... Zombies are BIG in our culture at this time. Unfortunately, I do not see this as a coincidence.

**Setting guidelines**

We have public health guidelines to assist parents with raising their children to eat healthy, be aware of the dangers of substances, and have responsible sex education. So since we do talk about birds and bees, booze and bongs... why are we not also actively developing a framework from a public health perspective on the healthy use of interactive technology?

Clinicians who deal with these situations have been demanding the development of such guidelines for years. I am happy to say over the last two years I have seen movement (at last!) of putting forward policies for consideration. But we are not to the point yet of being able to offer best practice principles that everyone will accept.

So how do we stress the importance of setting guidelines with technology and communication when it comes to Internet usage? The problem is that we find such communication tools and technologies in all aspects of our environment; at home, school, and work. More often than not, we rely on Internet connections and communications to deal with friends, family and yes, our employers.

Today, we can access various forms of government and nearly all types of businesses and service providers through the Internet, which is a good thing. Digital communication has literally erased borders when it comes to business industries and environments. Communications technologies have also enhanced competition, from the tiniest island in the South Pacific to Wall Street. The ability to communicate instantly has created numerous benefits not only in the business industries, but also in medicine and education as well as social and cultural environments and industries.

While the Internet provides a wealth of positive benefits, it also comes with certain dangers. Depending on the age and maturity level of the user, what lurks within the virtual world we have created can often be extremely hazardous.

The concept of social responsibility often suffers because a large portion of our private communications is performed via technology.

Though most parents today are especially aware of the importance of setting guidelines when it comes to technology and communication, many don't know where to start. For some parents (due to guilt from their own indulgence or other
reasons), it is difficult to refuse a child who argues he/she needs a cell phone for emergencies or feels left out because he/she cannot play interactive games with his/her friends.

Adults are just as affected. Without boundaries, less than stellar behaviours such as online gambling, gaming, and even pornography are readily accessible and available - and all in the confines of your private home, often in secret. With just a click on a screen, it is possible to hide such activities from your family, friends, or even your teachers.

Without a doubt, it is imperative for responsible adults to identify the growing problems created by the co-existence of the cyber and physical worlds.

**Fear of technology advancement or real threat to society?**

The fact is that uncontrolled and imbalanced use of technology is indeed problematic. The Internet and social media have exploded into virtual worlds overlapping our physical one. Remember when hardly anyone knew what Yahoo, or a dot.com meant? Those days are long gone, and yes, anyone who does remember them may very likely be considered a dinosaur, much like our parents or grandparents when they may talk about eight track tapes, laser discs, or even - heaven forbid - a typewriter, which can now be purchased as an antique.

We have a predicament when the impact of the virtual world creates problems in our everyday environments. Whether a person shows an unhealthy use of online gambling or shopping opportunities, or misuses of lesser accepted behaviours like online pornography, such behaviours affect our families, and sometimes even strangers. When our children become over-exposed to violent games and cyber bullying, this is definitely a cause for real concern.

Do we, while recognizing the wonderful benefits advanced technology provides, perceive that it also has the potential to cause adverse consequences? As such, these dangers should be acknowledged as well as researched, and public health guidelines should be developed for our society. If we have them for educating about sex, drugs, and other common issues in our communities, it behooves us to come up with some framework to promote the healthy use of technology.

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**REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

I strongly encourage you not to skip this important step in the process, which will definitely provide you with tools to explore the mind-sets that may connect to your own cyber behaviours.

**KEEPING REFLECTIONS: SKETCHPAD / JOURNAL GUIDELINES**

Critical reflection facilitates the development of awareness and examination of our unconsciously held values and beliefs about the world and ourselves that drive our behaviours. Some might want to keep an online journal to do this - and that is better than nothing at all - but I suggest using a physical book, as writing
by hand exercises a different part of your brain: another creative section of grey matter.

I suggest that you record a journal entry every few days. This activity should take approximately 15 minutes, although you may choose to spend more time or write more (or less) frequently. Please focus on your behaviours and activities involving cyberspace. The reflections on your entries over time are often highly revealing. You are likely to find it even more helpful if you share insights, perceptions, recurring themes, concerns or difficulties identified from your reflections with trusted friends or family. If you are constantly coming up with the same themes and issues, you might wish to review earlier sections of your journal and consider why you are not making any changes to those behaviours. Also, consider using drawings and sketches in addition to usual text to help you express your reflections.

Here are some examples of how you may wish to capture your thoughts in the journal:

Describe your expectations (aims/goals) and the experience (planned or not; who was there; your and other's behaviour, thoughts, feelings, etc.) when using social media.

What were the positive aspects? What were the difficulties encountered? For example, it was great catching up with a friend; however, it went on longer than planned. Perhaps you procrastinated on a work project by playing an online game? Perhaps you were late for an appointment because you spent too much time on a social media site?

What is your reflection and interpretation of the experience? How did it go and why did it go that way (e.g. how did you set a time limit).

What will you do differently next time (such as not spending money on an app) and why?

One of my favourite books is *The Artist's Way* by Julie Cameron⁴. There is an exercise called *Morning Pages* that helps with the development and enhancement of connecting with your thoughts and tools for transforming them into writing. I do this exercise daily.

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**KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER**

It is a reality that modern technology, in addition to its many benefits, has the potential to negatively impact millions of people.

Young people are especially vulnerable to overexposure and misuse of technology, leading to a myriad of social and ethical issues. Yet, adults are not
immune and many have fallen into developing cyber behavioural problems of their own. It is the job of responsible adults to learn how to recognize and resolve issues in themselves and their children.

Self-reflection is an essential first step in improving how you currently handle the daily interaction between the cyber and physical worlds. If you want to help others, you start with yourself.
**Interlude: The Waters of Cyberspace**

Just like bodies of water can be fresh, salt, or polluted, knowing the type of cyber environment you are in will help you navigate it. For example, a free app might have many types of hazards in it to entice or trap you to buy things inside that app. Another example is a site that claims to focus on the topic of healthcare but its content is actually populated by non-professionals or, even worse, marketers with erroneous information and lacking recognition from any authentic professional organizations.

Those who swim on a regular basis acquire a "feel" of the water. Near the surface, a few feet under, and deep below - the "feel" allows them to properly adjust their strokes and pull through it in effective ways. You too, over time, will detect and realize the type of websites and messages you are dealing with once you take the time to learn and experience interacting with cyberspace.
Part 2

**WADING IN: How Important Are Your Connections?**

This section covers the following topics:

- Virtual relations are "real"
- Cyber worlds are impacting personal, family and community behaviours and values
- Why it is important to balance all types of relationships (personal, financial, work, etc.)

**Let's talk about connection**

Since connection to technology is inevitable in this day and age, it is important to develop an approach to maintain a healthy balance as we benefit from its usage.

So whether you tweet, post, blog or text, let's dive in and deal with our Internet behaviours. Every one of us is affected in some way by the Internet, so let's take the time to figure out where we stand and develop beneficial strategies to bring our children up in today's virtual reality environments.

Oh, and in case you think I am speaking as though I don't have to deal with this professionally and personally on a daily basis: I do. I too have to manage being caught up in the cyber maelstrom while navigating my life as much as anyone else.

How important are your Internet and wireless connections to you? Where do you stand with technology in your home, work, and community? Do you have any rules regarding Internet or videogame usage for yourself or your kids?

These are not rhetorical questions.

Please review your score on the quiz in the previous section to assess your situation.

Access to the cyber world is a very valuable tool. However, I stress the importance of remaining in constant tune with your habits and attitudes regarding the virtual worlds, wireless communication and other Internet realms that have blended into our daily existence.

Many of us have responsibilities that we must perform that are dependent on cyber connections, but what about when you're not at work or school? We must recognize when we, or our loved ones, are overusing or misusing technology and cyber connections. Do you know anyone? Is it you?

Have you recognized such behaviours in yourself? If so, what prompted such behaviours? There is a cause and effect for everything - including the overuse of wireless communication, videogames, social networking and the Internet. I know some people who are lonely, isolated and depressed that rely on the Internet to
communicate with and be connected to the outside world. It doesn't matter if that person is real or virtual ... they are communicating.

The fact is these "pseudo" relationships have some "reality" to them as you might realize when you consider your own connections. The questions arise: What is the optimal balance? When is it too many cyber-relationships rather than face-to-face connections?

Consider the following scenarios:

• Abigail is a computer science major and spends hours online discussing this or that topic on social media with cyber friends. Most of her days are spent in front of a computer working on projects. She also runs every other day training for a 10K race, has a boyfriend that she spends time with on the weekends, and gets A's in her classes. She still lives with her parents, who are concerned she has "Internet addiction". Should they be worried?

• Or take Billy-Bob. He doesn't spend much time on the computer. He mostly likes to tweet all night with friends. In fact, he has a hard time getting to bed because he and his long-distance girlfriend tweet until the wee hours of the morning. He eventually goes to his family physician with the complaint of insomnia, asking for sleeping pills. He has been late to work some mornings and his boss has complained about it. "Just stop tweeting," says the doctor. Do you think it will be that easy?

• Then there is Ceylona. She is a teenager from a family whose interpretation of their culture defines that she cannot go out with friends or even talk to boys until they arrange a marriage for her. They also believe in physical punishment. So, she spends her time on the Net building relationships and develops many cyber-friends who provide her with moral support and an opportunity for a virtual escape from her family's strict rules.

Here is an acid test for you that we will come back to later in this book. You come home from work and find your partner engaged online in a cyber-sex chat with some other person in a game platform. When you exclaim, "What are you doing?" your partner says, "Don't worry - it isn't real - it's all fantasy virtual reality!" Should you care?

Our reliance and attachment to the Internet and virtual connections are not a simple black and white issue, but involve many different aspects of our social environment. School, work, peer pressure, and our own emotional and mental health play a role in how we feel about the Internet and how important our digital connections are to us.

This should not be a surprise considering human beings are complex! Simple solutions and answers to complex situations are usually inadequate ... so take the time to critically reflect and think about what you are about to read.

Where do you stand with technology?

Most of us have computers, tablets, smartphones, and videogames in our homes
now, but how do you use those connections within your domain? (No pun intended - well, okay it was intended.) Do you use wireless technology to research for work or school, even after hours, or do you rely on the Internet for an hour or more of entertainment and/or amusement on a daily basis?

As for myself, I am on my various technological portals a good portion of the day. I use them for Electronic Medical Records. I use the technology to touch base with my family as well as to keep track of my other duties since I wear many hats in the healthcare field, in addition to being a psychiatrist who treats patients. I use it for teleconferences in meetings. I have successfully (although my family will likely disagree) developed strategies to try to balance all of my technology uses - but it requires a dynamic approach and an appreciation that constant "course corrections" are required to make it all work.

This topic is not easy to break down, as everyone uses the Internet according to their own personal interests and preferences. As such, the allure or pull of the Internet may affect people differently. Other factors can make people more vulnerable to falling into use of the technology and connections in problematic ways.

For example, teenagers might rely on the Internet to communicate after school in chat rooms (yes they still exist), through instant messaging, instagrams, online games, and many more cyber connection options. This instant access is extremely important to those who've grown up with the technology. Not a bad thing - unless such behaviours become disruptive or endanger the teen. I am not suggesting that teens are the only age group that sometimes has a hard time finding the boundaries when it comes to the Internet. In fact, did a beep or vibration interrupt you from one of your friendly technological tools to check messages since you started reading this book?

Adults often use the Internet in the same manner. Moderate usage is considered 'okay', but what if that 'moderate' usage involves some 'not-so-nice' behaviours? What are we even talking about in terms of defining 'moderate' and 'not-so-nice' as it relates to this issue? These terms tend to be kind of generic, vague and thus useless in a practical sense. What is actually more important is knowing the impact on a person's life based on the behaviour regardless of time and intensity.

As another example, what if a grandmother in a nursing home discovers an online auction or gambling site and finds that she is growing increasingly pulled toward the thrill of the bet - and quickly drains her bank account by winning bidding wars? She used to love Bingo - but this is even more fun!

What do you do about a busy manager who finds relief and amusement looking at adult sites, and even thinks about opening a line of communication with a streaming video pornography performer on the other end? Now that manager is checking some racy sites during work hours. "But I get my work done!" he/she thinks.

What do you do about the mom who logs online the minute hubby and the kids are off to school to flirt with complete strangers in chat rooms, or to make a few
extra bucks on the side providing downloadable nude images of herself in her bedroom?

These scenarios are not provided to place judgment but to illustrate examples of potential situations that could occur in any home or workplace...including yours.

This is not about right or wrong - it's about understanding a context to appreciate the driving motivations of why a person might engage in a behaviour.

In the example of the at-home mother, what happens if we add in more elements to the story, such as her husband is never home and she is aware he has had affairs with other women of a physical nature on a regular basis. She is scared to leave him, as she worries about her children and doesn't know if she can get a good paying job. In fact, she stays at home now with her one-year-old child. She feels lonely, unloved, isolated and trapped. She has the Internet as an outlet and also found a way to make some money she is secretly saving up so she can leave her husband.

On the other hand, perhaps the situation is that she actually has a sex addiction (which started innocently enough in a chat room and got out of hand for various reasons) and the Internet is one way she gets her needs met.

Am I suggesting that everyone who spends time on the Internet is doing things like this? Absolutely not. But some are, and knowing the signs of when behaviours become problematic is the key to finding help and support.

Again, moral judgment is inappropriate and serves no real purpose here; there are many motivations that drive people to do what they do. What has real value is remembering to reflect on your behaviours and those of people you care about to figure out strategies to maintain a healthy balance.

We all have judgements and biases. It is very hard to take control of your own life and take a stand regarding cyber behaviours if you do not recognize you have these judgments. We will discuss that we are all human, and most people end up in precarious situations due to many factors, often having to adapt and react to situations beyond their control. Understanding motivation behind the action will assist with changing the behaviours.

Where did the time go?

Today, even toddlers learn how to interact with the world around them through digital devices and high-tech toys. In fact, they seem more apt at using tablets and smartphones than older kids and adults! To test your savvy regarding Internet usage by our youth today, take a moment and give your best answer to the following questions:

  • On average, how many hours do youth of today spend online (and this doesn't include texting back and forth on a cell phone)?
  • What is the average number of texts that young people send to others on a monthly basis?

Many of us underestimate the number of hours a day our youth are online. The
Institute of Ontario and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) performed a study that offered some surprising results. The average youth today spends approximately 7 1/2 hours daily online!

The results regarding the number of texts sent back and forth are on average 3,000 per month. Those with super fast fingers or focus on their digital devices can send up to 6,000 texts a month or even more.

These are surprising and sobering statistics. Our youth make broad use of social media including Twitter™, Facebook™, YouTube™, the older MySpace™, and dozens of others that offer instant access for interaction.

Misuse of the Internet, especially by our youth, is certainly not limited to the amount of time they spend video gaming, posting or tweeting. Many of us don't understand how our youth can be so enamoured or "hooked" into their interaction with the Internet, but many adults are just as infatuated. Unfortunately, more teenagers today are involved in texting and sexting behaviours than most parents can imagine. They're joining popular fan sites and communicating with strangers who have 'friended' them.

It seems that 'old-fashioned' forms of communication have gone the way of the typewriter, the 8-track and the laser disc. (Perhaps you are asking yourself - What on earth is he talking about?) It's seems so much easier to meet, date and communicate online without having to actually practice human interaction.

How do we set rules that not only keep ourselves and our future generations safe, but also encourage healthy relationships with technology? Exactly when does a relationship with the Internet become unhealthy?

Well, just like the oxygen mask should be placed on yourself before putting it on the loved one next to you on an airplane... you have to start with yourself first.

What kind of rules do you live by in your home, at work, at school, in regard to social media? Are you or your kids at risk for developing less than healthy habits when it comes to the Internet? When does casual use morph into a harmful misuse?

21st Century Dinner Pastiche

Mr. and Mrs. Jones have a 12-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter. Tonight's dinner is to be "served" at 6:00 p.m. After mother runs from her office job to pick up the kids and take them home, she sets the table and prepares dinner. Mr. Jones is late but mom calls the kids down to dinner. The son says nothing, as he's still on level 67.1 of his videogame and can't let his team members down who are all virtually playing together. He is barricaded in his room. Daughter waltzes down with ear buds in her ears, talking to someone on her smartphone as she scoops up food, starts chewing and continues talking. Mom asks her how her day was, but daughter keeps chewing and talking to her not-physically present friend and motions mother to stop interrupting her.

Mom calls son again and he again ignores her. Father arrives and is on his
smartphone furiously texting... he is in real estate and has told the family he needs to take messages 24/7 for deals. He does not apologize for being late and sits at the dinner table, texting more and waiting to be served. Mom serves all, leaves food out for son, and then goes off on her own. She gets on her tablet and logs on to her virtual chat rooms to have some sexy-romantic love chats with some others...

Rules regarding technology, screen time, and other cyber usage in homes around the country differ depending on the attitudes and upbringing of not only children, but also their parents. For example, some parents only allow younger children access to certain websites or activities on the Internet through blocking and monitoring, while parents of older children may encourage the honour system when it comes to Internet usage and interaction with others. Other parents routinely check browser histories, but others maintain a hands-off attitude when it comes to their teens and Internet usage.

Parents have always struggled with finding balance when raising their children and the same can be said of Internet use. To what extent do you trust your children to follow your rules and guidelines, and hope and sometimes pray that they don't go behind your back and do things they're not supposed to be doing when you're not looking?

This is especially a dilemma if you set guidelines and rules that you do not follow yourself.

Today, peer pressure, family environments, and a variety of social variables encourage a number of risk factors when it comes to Internet usage by teens and, yes, by some adults as well. How do you know if your teenager or loved one is heading into the danger zone when it comes to their digital connections?

Here are a few clues to help you identify whether someone in your home may be getting a little too attached to the Internet:

- Developing difficulties at school or work (grades, sports, sociability) / Getting behind on work projects
- Spending more and more time on the computer
- Ignoring household responsibilities and chores
- Spending increasing amounts of money on games (store-bought or downloads)

Note that this doesn't necessarily mean they have an "Internet addiction" but any sign of functional impairment should raise concerns. Later in the book you will find an entire section devoted to delving into "when is it actually a problem?"

Problems with technological use may grow if your child spends less time on other activities that he or she used to enjoy in favour of spending more time on the Internet, or even lying about the time he or she spends on the Internet.

It's not always easy to set rules to live by in any environment. It's up to each individual and household to determine and monitor the rules. There are no easy
answers. Being aware, being involved, and maintaining open lines of communication are just a few of the ways that parents today can get a pulse on the importance of digital connection to their children and act accordingly.

Childhood and adolescent challenges are present in every generation but passage through the challenges can be made easier with the appropriate tools, support, and knowledge.

I am not saying that all people are so enthralled with the Internet that we can't drag them away or that the Internet, social media, and gaming is bad. It's important not to jump to conclusions and to express a knee-jerk reaction when you or your children want to play World of Warcraft™ or other brand name games, or even purchase something off of eBay.

As with just about everything in life, moderation is the key. But as discussed earlier, just what does the term moderation mean? Well, the quick answer is: participation in anything that doesn't impair anyone's functionally!

There is no doubt that our Internet digital connections and virtual relationships for home and work have forms of value for those who forge them.

However, regardless of how prevalent such connections are in our 21st century environment, the virtual landscape is here to stay. It is our responsibility and obligation to practice the same amount of restraint and control as we do with aspects of our off-line environment.

**The reality of 21st-Century communication and our new virtual landscape**

"You youngins got it easy nowadays... when I was your age I had to walk to school 20 miles in the snow!"

30 years later: "I had to walk across the living room to change the channels!"

20 years later: "I had to keep my phone connected to a cord! And sometimes use a dial!"

10 years later: "I had to use a pager!"

5 years later: "I had to use a desktop computer!"

And so on...

Growing up today is much different than it was a few decades ago. Technological advances are made much quicker in our generation and knowledge and tools are becoming more quickly obsolete. Anyone born after 1990 has been exposed to computer usage and the Internet at a very early age. Such children don't know what it's like not to have a computer, a cell phone, or the Internet. They will often laugh and find it nearly impossible to imagine a world without digital technology and the ease of communications that we enjoy today.

I often watch what happens around the holiday season when parents are out shopping for their kids. Times have changed, and the games and toys kids want today are a far cry from what many of us grew up with. Some just want to get their parents' iTunes™ password for their gift!
I've come up with a list that I'd like to share with you. It's called:

"Santa's Cyber Health List" -

Check It Twice to Avoid Being Naughty and Perhaps Be Nice:

- Gadgets, games and consoles galore: have rules for their use before they make it through the door!
- A game where you can kill women and steal cars for a prize may not be a good choice for your family to promote peaceful lives.
- If you are secretly buying a game for yourself instead of your kids, best to fess up and examine yourself with open lids!
- Time to be in bed before Santa arrives - those who set no limits for bedtime will find out how quickly routine activities don't survive.
- Besides content and time, do not forget access - having online connections without boundaries can lead to misuse!
- Can your children really afford the monthly fees - or are you about to enter an on-going trap that you'll have to appease?
- Can you really afford the things you are buying - overspending can be as problematic as gaming - so no lying (to yourself).
- When buying a gizmo for you or your child - get what is needed and not the bells and whistles wild! Some of those features you may regret - as the access to addictive elements can pose a threat.
- Monitor and know your son and daughter's online habits - including their use of smart phones, laptops, and the ever-growing number of tablets!
- Take techno breaks for a day or three and see what happens with your family!

Now, this list may seem amusing to you, but some of you reading it are more than likely nodding your head in agreement, recalling such behaviours or actions on your own part or the part of your kids. We've all seen it, and we've all been around it. While the list is tongue-in-cheek, it contains some very valuable advice when it comes to living in the reality of our 21st century environment.

Many children and adults are relatively responsible when it comes to computers, digital stuff, and financial responsibilities and obligations regarding such technology. However, do you know how much money you spend every month on Internet usage or digital communication?

Take a moment and dig through your bills in order to answer the following questions:

- Do you know how much you're paying every month for your family data plan for cell phone usage? That includes texting, downloading, apps, usage allowances and so forth.
- When it comes to laptop and desktop computers at home (whether you're
using wireless services, broadband, cable, or landline) how much do those monthly bills come to, and what do you pay extra for over-usage beyond what you're allotted?

- You've bought your son a video game console, but is there a subscription associated with the game he's playing (such as online or interactive or group role playing games that require monthly subscription fees)?

When it comes to cell phones, people sometimes don't realize that the overall cost of having that smartphone not only includes the purchase price of the phone device itself, but monthly usage plans - the true money maker for a company.

This is similar when it comes to tablets: it's not just the device but the type and cost of Internet services attached to that tablet that hit the pocketbook. Check the price for just the basics and then compare it with the price you pay for all the features and you'll likely be surprised. The same goes for your smartphones.

Youth often have expendable leisure funds while parents pick up the other costs. While perhaps previous generations didn't spend their allowances or ask our parents to spend money on Internet connections, media plans, and smartphone apps, they could get wrapped up in their own environments too, whether it was driving aimlessly around in a used car, concert-going, or whatever. Unlike the past, the youth today now have online access and instant "buy it now" lures in cyberspace.

Themes from the above will be further explored in the section devoted to online shopping behaviours later in this book.

The key is to determine guidelines and expectations for people living at home today when it comes to their Internet usage. Whether they're playing video games, want a new game console, or need to pay subscription fees for their online gaming environments or role-playing games, it's important to set guidelines and follow through with them based on your family's set budget and rules related to Internet use. This can be done through contracts and similar methods covered later in the book.

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**REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

**Relationship List**

- Make a list of your "real" relationships - family, friends, acquaintances, key work colleagues, etc.
- Make a list of "virtual" relationships.
- Compare the two lists and reflect on the importance of the people on each list.

**The High Cost of Cyber Living**

Part I.
Get a blank sheet of paper or open a blank word processing document and write up all the costs associated with your cyber life. Also, record all the activities you may financially support in your family. This includes Internet costs, data plans, hardware, games, music apps and similar purchases. Then add it up for a monthly amount and multiply by 12 to get a feel of how much this comes to yearly.

Reflect on these amounts. Are these within a range you find healthy?

Part II.

For one week, please record how much time you spend in front of any access point to the cyber world. It doesn't have to be exact - estimate if you will. You can differentiate if you wish between devices (smartphone, laptop, tablet, streaming video on a TV), categories (work, family, personal etc.). Add all of it up to find an average daily amount of time and the amount for the full week.

Then reflect on the sums you came up with. How did it add up?

Part III.

After reflecting on the activities above, please sit down for one hour and sketch out what are essential monetary and time costs you must expend for healthy living, and what is above and beyond that base (i.e., if at work you are in front of a computer for your duties, that is essential). If you are playing online poker for fun, is that essential? Only you can decide. Perhaps playing a game for an amount of time you would consider important - but if that time is so much that it outweighs something like parenting, it is something to think more about.

Part IV.

Decide what the essential and nonessential uses are. Choose an activity from each to monitor for one week. Decide if you wish to maintain or alter the amount of time for each, then do so. Enter your experience for the two activities in your reflection journal.

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KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

Dangerous cyber connection activity knows no boundaries and has no prejudice. It affects people of all ages, social status and geographical location. Determine, set, and follow rules that work for your particular lifestyle. As we discussed before, navigating the waters in a safe yet effective manner requires focus and planning successful strategies to keep you and your family from drowning in the deep, and sometimes dangerous, online waterways.

In each situation, you'll discover underlying personal issues that affect how an
individual uses (or misuses) Internet communication. Keep this in mind to prevent unfair judgements of a situation.

Learn the signs that will help you identify whether someone in your home or someone you know may be getting problematically attached to the Internet.
Interlude: Riding WWW-Waves!

One of the major difficulties of learning to swim is coordinating your breathing. Those of you who want to help your family and friends deal with cyber issues do need to learn to cyber swim at some basic level! The trouble comes if you feel overwhelmed that there "is so much out there - it changes so fast - new phones, apps, argh!" Yes, that is true, so you need to learn how not to worry about perfection and trying to know everything; rather, learn how to ride a wave and know the essential concepts we will discuss in this book. You don't need to become an Olympic swimmer... no, just a basic swim technique and when and how to access life saving techniques when required!

So, your breathing is important. In. Out. Inhale. Exhale. Repeat. Consider this the dynamic balance one must maintain for many things - including how much cyber time versus "real world" time, work versus leisure, family versus self-hobbies, and so on. A pattern needs to be created and you must be ready to make adjustments as the context in our lives changes. Smart swimmers don't keep doing the same stroke when a tidal wave is approaching - and neither should you!

At the same time, when you are feeling at a loss for breath, you need to really take action to adjust what you are doing, even if it means "treading" or just flipping onto your back to get a rest.

Due to the deluge of information and messages from the Net, we often feel overwhelmed. This can cause people to panic because they are unsure how to shift through the waves and surf through turbulent waters. Holding your breath doesn't help in the long run... that can lead to panic.

Learning to focus on what you can influence (and perhaps control) versus what is beyond your control is the first step.

So you need to reflect on behaviours in which you or the people you care about are engaged. You need to understand what is working and what needs improvement before trying to make any changes!

Swimmers talk about "Sighting" - which is when the swimmer sometimes raises the head out of the water to see where they are going. However, it comes with a price - it can slow you down and perhaps make you feel as if your body is sinking. Well, it is important to sometimes take time to set your goals and your direction in life; just the effort of doing so does take time away from your regular routine. However, it is easy to end up in an endless whirlpool if you don't rise above the daily grind of cyber emails and texts to ask yourself what you are trying to do with your life. Sometimes you may even have to stop and go to shore to figure this out!
Part 3

**TSUNAMI! Information overload**

This section covers the following topics:

- Observing the growing dependence on cybertech
- Consider the effects of dealing with huge amounts of information/communications from the cyber
- Distinguish useful information/communications from the detritus

"*We are the Borg. Lower your shields and surrender your ships. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service us. Resistance is futile.*"

The Borg\(^2\) from *Star Trek: First Contact*

In mid-October 2011, Blackberry™ users around the world were faced with a server breakdown, resulting in loss of e-mails, text messages and other items. The telephone functions worked for the most part, but that didn’t matter. Their cyber communication connections were cut.

Just like the Toronto to New York power blackout in 2003, when people learned to adapt (at least for a short time) and feel what it was like to make do without instant cyber access.

A wail was heard across the land as the owners of these devices became angry, upset, and dismayed. Some reactions from owners included a devaluing of the smartphone by labelling it junk, ranting to whoever would listen that they would throw the “thing” in the garbage and purchase an Android™, iPhone™ or a smartphone from another major company.\(^8\)

For those of you who use the Internet and cyber connections in other ways, you may have had times where the connections were slow or e-mails were down for a few hours or even a day. You might describe the experience as feeling a sense of withdrawal until you had a chance to acclimatize! I’ve heard some describe losing access to the Net akin to having a limb severed or going blind.

In fact, many people are now paying to go on digital free vacations and no-tech resorts. Seeking a retreat or refuge from the waves of information is difficult in a home unless the family develops and sticks to healthy guidelines we will discuss in the latter portion of the book. Even so, being away from all the virtual ties for periods of time may require physical distance from the usual work and home haunts.

We all (young and old) have grown incredibly attached to our devices. In some cases, this dependence may be parasitic in nature. The level of emotional reaction that some felt toward the blackout experience was interesting; some
owners actually felt betrayed by the device itself - as if it let its human master down.

A number of new devices can talk and listen to voice commands through popular interactive programs, which appear to make the smartphone "sentient" and a "friend". Ask it to tell you a joke. It might... or might not. It can help book a dinner for you. It can tell you something nice. The science fiction films such as 2001: A Space Odyssey's HAL9000 comes to mind...and with some connections to some robotics - we can get some androids too.

Smartphone evolution! Personification and anthropomorphism...until perhaps they really do become semi-sentient. Before you laugh - the social concerns expressed in Ray Bradbury's and Philip K. Dick's dystopian futures regarding media and virtual worlds have pretty much become reality.

Let's move away from these literary masters and get back to the effect of the connections these portal devices provide. Some equipment used by swimmers is convenient but not imperative to the ability to swim (waterproof watches, for instance) while other items (such as choice of swimwear or colour of goggles) are personal statements of the swimmer. But there is equipment that swimmers and divers must have before even considering getting into the water - equipment and training that could mean the difference between life and death.

How can YOU get along without your cyber connections? What do YOU do without a search engine, a mobile smart phone or similar technology?

The number of "Likes" or even "Dislikes" posted on social network sites, and focused marketing endeavours collect data about the sites we visit, the things we buy.

Problems can occur when people change how they treat one another as a result of interacting with such technologies and media.

The technology is here to stay. It will continue to advance in capabilities, functionality, and design. Use of such devices is once and for all embedded into our academic, home, and workplace environments.

Is resistance really futile? What is not futile is our ability to resist thoughtless, mindless and automatic use of technology and its resulting push for instant connection and a near instantaneous demand for response. We can develop healthier guidelines for living alongside and with technology, increasing awareness on how technology has transformed culture and society around the world while at the same time insuring we maintain our humanity.

Ask yourself the following:

- Are you already "assimilated" into the cyber?[10]
- Are you so wired and connected to your devices that you let brands do your thinking for you?
- Do you allow the "likes" or "dislikes" on your Facebook page to influence...
who you are, what you think deep down, or what you know is right or wrong?

- Do you feel as if you just can't get away from your cyber connections, even for a few hours (let alone an entire day) because you are unable to function or experience a void without them?
- Are you barraged with cyber information coming at you from all directions on a daily basis?
- Are you constantly dealing with information overload? Worse yet, do you no longer realize this is information overload, but now consider this the "new normal" and attempt to multitask like a juggler on a tightrope?

**Overload defined**

Chances are you're experiencing information overload, which means that at every waking moment being barraged with snippets of information from televisions, radios, or cell phone and computer updates. On a daily basis we receive data communication. A portion of it relates to business, work or other necessary information. In most cases, an even larger portion is entertainment related, shopping, and so called "junk" mail (you'll find it in your email folders).

We use Global Positioning System (GPS) devices to find our way, the Internet to find a restaurant, a movie, or the store closest to us, overloading our minds with giving and receiving information via technology. We receive input from numerous sources, advertisements, Internet, chats, television, and our Inbox to the point where we feel like screaming, "Enough!"

Not only do we get overloaded with information, some people develop an "information junkie" aspect where they wander from link to link in the maze of factoids (true and false), dog paddling in the expanse of aquatic cyber voids.

Many people delete emails without reading them just for efficiency. Many are inundated by emails or similar communications from colleagues and friends that are the equivalent of cyber-grunts, "uh-huhs", or cover-your-butt-at-work (in sending some quick FYI to create some e-mail trail) message, or just the ubiquitous, "Here is a true story!" or "Latest Jokes!" or "Feel Good Messages."

Then the e-scum ripples of messages of "Get your Viagra™ online" and other junk emails, such as the infamous scam: "I am in need of a transfer of money to my country, which is located at the ends of the earth. Kindly fork over a large amount money in your bank account and I'll give you money in return when I see you - plus interest." Or, "Just give me your bank # and personal ID information and I will transfer $3.8 quadrillion dollars to you to get my funds out of my country."

Before you say, "Ha! I'll never fall for those!" - some people do, which is why these emails continue. If no one fell for them, then the scam artists would have ceased this approach long ago.

One of my professional hats is that of an illusionist. Within that sphere, I have learned many magical presentations that are designed to fool people based on their cognitive/thinking processes of how they have decided to perceive the
world. Not just with big giant stage props, but the "sucker" bets and "bar" card tricks. I actually have designed simulations for people to appreciate how people fall prey to faulty thinking in gambling situations. What I have learned is the day you believe you cannot be fooled - well, you have fooled yourself. The e-messages get more clever with time. Have you ever been tempted to open an e-message from a bank, PayPal, or other company saying there is a problem with your account? Open it and suddenly you might have given away data for cyber thieves... some who have replicated entire organizational websites in the hope you can be tricked.

Here is a typical one I received December 8th 2014, scanned by an international hospital's security system...

HEADER: Canada Revenue Agency | Reference ID: 690550
FROM: NOTICE OF TAX RETURN
Dear bruce_ballon@XXX,
Tax Refund of: CAD 795$
Please complete this form in order to receive your tax refund.
To access the form for your tax refund, Please click on the link below:
www.samplejobdescription.xxx.xxx.xxx.xxx.arc.gc.ca_esrvc_srvce_tx_ndvdl_s_myccnt_menu.eng/index.html
Please submit the tax refund form before: 11 Dec 2014

This email has been scanned by the XXX Email Security System.

(Yes, I added in a few XXXs here and there so you don't accidently open that link! Also, to cloak the name of the hospital.)

Please note: if you actually look at the email address it was sent from, it is entitled "NOTICE OF TAX RETURN"... however if you click on it to find out what its true email was you would find: 56175-rdmaoe@xxx.com. This is NOT a regular CRA email address now, is it?

You better not hit the link or download the attachment if you get one of these emails!

No matter the level of security, even in a top international institution, these cyber scams can sneak between the IT defences.

The price of virus free tech and identity theft protection is eternal cyber vigilance. You can't count on anti-virus and other guardian programs for everything - you need to be aware and use your common sense in cyberspace.

Here are some practical tips: even from seemingly legitimate emails - never open messages with odd attachments, or at least do not open the attachment. If you do not know the sender always think twice. If you really think there is a problem with a bank account, do not follow any links from the sent message - open up a new webpage to the actual company site. Find out legitimate contact information
for the company and call them or send a message through a customer service account. Save the email to send to the company so they can track back the villains if it turns out it was a scam.

**Information is not always true**

I referenced Wikipedia for the Borg definition in the footnote. I happen to know Star Trek well and have watched it and know the description in the "Wiki" appears to be valid based on my own personal knowledge.

However, Wikipedia is not an entirely authenticated validated source of knowledge. It is a socially constructed site where people who connect to it can upload entries. Not all of the information can be taken as being authenticated to any level of rigor. Some of it appears to be - some areas are tagged as "needing more validation" - and much more is left in the land of ambiguity.

Yet, many people (sometimes in haste and due to time pressures) turn toward such sites and use the information as "fact". In some cases it is, but in some cases the information is incorrect. For example, a colleague of mine was once accused of having used an entry from Wikipedia in a report. However, the ironic part was that the Wikipedia entry identified was actually copied from a chapter my colleague had written in a published book from a healthcare institution years before! Convoluted, isn't it?

**A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing**

The Internet is bursting with websites full of quick tips and easy solutions for the problems and issues of our complex lives. Often you can get more "tips" for money... and often the knowledge is just recycled information known for ages with modern lingo tossed in.

In my own clinical practice I often encounter patients who research health topics - often avoiding what appear to be sites run by well-respected institutions for the more "chat room" and "anti-medicine" sites. I often explore these sites with them during our sessions and educate them about the information that they are reading.

Some interesting examples include: an Internet search for the word "abstinence" immediately and unwittingly brought us to sites that explored different sexual options other than vaginal intercourse. Another search for safe substance use brought us to a site that discussed how to pop an antidepressant like Prozac™ before taking rave drugs to prevent possible permanent negative effects, which if one understands the pharmacology and neurochemistry behind these substances, could not possibly work.

A darker example you may have heard of is some youth used to use marijuana soaked in embalming fluid, often referred to as "wet", "fry", or "illy". Besides creating euphoria, often it can cause seizures and comas. The reason I bring this up is that it appears this was partially spawned by a misunderstanding in communication and incomplete knowledge: A slang term for marijuana dipped in PCP (angel dust) was "Embalmung Fluid". Some people took it literally and
started dipping their weed into formaldehyde... and thus we have "illy".

Our minds can handle only so much before we start taking "shortcuts" and just try to piece together fragments of information to keep treading in the sea of information. However, the Internet is vast and the information in it can be dangerous as much as it can be helpful. Examples include cyber bullying, suicide encouragement, how to keep your eating disorders active, and industries such as Pharma companies getting their own marketers to post personal "true" stories of how Drug X saved their lives - and these are just the tip of the cyber-berg.

Do not believe everything you read. That should apply to this book too - please do not just except what I am sharing here without taking time to reflect and put it in context for yourself.

I was going to write on this subject a great deal more. However, I noticed a new book was just released in the summer of 2014 by Charles Seife entitled "Virtual Unreality" devoted to exploring what information is valid or not in the realms of cyberspace. I highly recommend this book for those wishing to dive deeper into this topic.

**Where do you stand?**

Think what information is to you.

1. Curiosity
2. Communication
3. Checking in on the latest funny cat and dog pictures
4. Other

Are you a surfer or browser, or do you actually use your computer to gather information about a specific topic? Do you log on merely to Facebook™ and check out what all your friends have been up to today, or are you taking care of banking, bill-paying, or checking out sports statistics?

Consider how hooked you might be to using the Internet to manage your life via cyberspace and you get a glimmer of how youth consider their own virtual 24/7 worlds in a similar way.

Today, communication has been made easier than ever before through our modems or wireless access. However, these days, it seems to be more about quantity and quality. When it comes to communication and information, very few of us know how to turn it off.

It may surprise you the last time you completely shut down your computer, cell phone and other devices for more than a few hours. Some of us even leave them on during the night. Many of us can't remember the last time we had a conversation or night out with friends or family without someone in the group checking their phones for emails or messages.

Sometimes, our very habits can lead to information overload and an over reliance on our communication devices. David Lewis, of the International Stress
Management Association, coined the phrase *information fatigue syndrome* that suits the topic. This constant deluge of data and information can carry a mental and physical cost. Every day around the world, people are stuck in a cycle of technology that starts from the moment they awake until they go to bed.

**What's the big deal?**

There are many consequences to this trend of cyber dependence. Many of us are reducing our attention spans. Young people today have it even worse. Information that comes to us in snippets has created an entire generation that finds the thought of actually doing something that requires concentration or focus for more than 10 or 15 minutes stressful! More youth today are frustrated at the thought of having to actually write, using (gasp) a pen and a piece of paper rather than their keyboards. Sadly, many children and adults struggle to convey their thoughts on paper and quickly grow frustrated and impatient.

In fact, some schools are foregoing teaching how to write in cursive in response to thinking technology will make it obsolete! [13]

**A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to a Talk about Internet Misuse**

(A true story, if you want to accept that I am reliable!)

Usually at many presentations I give, I have a PowerPoint slide early on that projects the following message - "CHALLENGE!" - and then I tell the assembled the following:

"*To create the best learning environment we can, I ask that you put your cell phones and similar devices to vibrate. I will not ask you to shut them off, since many of you deal with clinical situations, and urgent and emergency situations arise. However, if such a situation does occur, could you please go outside the presentation area to answer it / text etc., and return only when you can again give the group process your full attention?*

Ninety-nine percent of the time, the group agrees - although not everyone follows the instructions/request anyway... which is also why I also add the following to the challenge:

"*If your device does go off, please note how many times it does during the presentation. Also, note any devices of the people around you going off and how they handle it. We can check in later to reflect on how wired in we are today!*

Nothing like getting the community involved...

I use the above to get people thinking about the concept of being "wired in wirelessly" to the vast network around us. It is useful for many reflections.

Because, you see, I believe we need to create guidelines and principles, not only at presentations, but also at clinical meetings, case rounds, business meetings, and schools - any place where people gather. What I hope will happen one day is that a set of guidelines will be created by Public Health - with input from the
community (like us).

But first, allow me to share an interesting experience that highlights many of the issues you might face trying to implement such guidelines in your own settings.

Most times, there is very little problem with getting a group to agree to the challenge guidelines I described above. Yet, there was one time in particular that a certain group really took me to task and resisted!

In fact, what usually takes 30 seconds for most groups took 20 minutes in total for this crew. Since the topic I was to speak on involved being over-connected to the Net and technology, I used the 20 minutes to illustrate points and issues on the topic itself!

These arguments involved primarily the use of cell phones in business gatherings, the myths of multitasking, fighting boredom, etiquette, and not speaking up to address the behaviours.

I have paraphrased some of the arguments posed to me from the group below:

#1. "Multitasking is good! Just like the youth - they do multiple tasks! The literature supports this, doesn't it? Won't I be more productive doing a few things at once?"

Actually, the literature shows over and over that multitasking is not recommended as an effective work strategy. It is sometimes done because of situational requirements, but it has been noted to lead to inattention issues, more errors in tasks, and emotional drain. In fact, another participant in this group asked if they could look up those references on their hand-held device - and confirmed what I was saying. Multitasking is not actually doing multiple things simultaneously - it is how quickly you shift attention back and forth and focus on one thing before you start to make errors. A wonderful video I encourage you to watch on YouTube is the 'Monkey Business Illusion'... I won't say more except it is a wonderful demonstration of our attention capacity and situational awareness (or lack of it!).

#2. "I only do it if I get bored!"

Well, what to say to that argument? I said that if someone was bored at any point in time during the presentation, I'd prefer that this person - or anyone - raise their hand and point out their concern or ask a question to bring the discussion toward a topic of their personal interest related to the goals of the presentation.

"Wouldn't that be rude?" asked someone. I asked which was ruder - alerting the presenter with dialogue to help keep that participant engaged or letting that person wander off into the cyber realms which would then send a message that it is okay for others to do the same.

I also pointed out that if the goals and content of a presentation were not relevant or interesting to the participant, he or she should ask himself or herself why he or she came, and if they need to - leave. It is true that there are mandatory meetings and trainings, but it is important for presenters and/or team chairs to
hear from others about how to involve participants in a group. If it is not necessary for a person to be present at a meeting, they should not attend. However, if someone needs to attend, it is unclear why the person would become unengaged with the meeting process.

In the end, everyone has to own their actions - and being bored falls on the participant, the group, and the presenter. But each cannot wait for the other to "mind read" the situation.

This little microcosm of an example can be seen in many places where etiquette of using a cell phone in the middle of various social gatherings is now considered "appropriate" vs. "rude". This is because as a society, such acceptance has crept in; partly due to keeping up with the information tsunami we already covered as well as that others have allowed this to occur in the social groups until it has become "accepted." This does not mean it is healthy; there are many things in society accepted at times that turn out to be very unhealthy - like smoking nicotine.

We eventually decided to vote for adopting the challenge guidelines and enact the challenge rules, but some abstained. I asked the abstainers why they abstained:

"I don't own a cell phone - so I have no right to vote."

I asked one abstainer if he was a member of the group and a member of society. He answered in the affirmative so I commented that, although one might not own a device, one is still affected by the beeps, sounds and actions of the user texting. One might not smoke, yet might still want a non-smoking room during a clinical meeting. As mentioned with multitasking, the more stimuli around, the more errors that can occur. If someone is texting/emailing in the middle of an important discussion, it can distract everyone as well as reduce the input (which might be important) from the individual doing the texting. Thus, the vote can apply to everyone who can be affected by the use of the devices, even if the person isn't the one directly using them.

In short, if you don't speak up, you are contributing to the social modelling around you - your silence is your choice and your vote. So accept it and decide if you want to keep your head low or do something about it - either is fine - just accept that your actions are your choices.

#3. "I don't want to get in trouble."

Due to peer pressure, some abstainers said that there were a few intimidating users of the devices in meetings and they didn't want to rock the boat by voting. Some also admitted they wanted to have the option to still use their devices, so they figured better to stay silent and hope for the best.

And after all that - yes, we finally agreed to attempt to follow the guidelines for using the mobile devices. Some people turned off their devices and placed them on the table, then moved them out of reach. I noticed some kept the screens face up so they could still peek - but hey, the educational points were made.
I then proceeded with the rest of the presentation. But in some ways, I was happy that those 20 minutes occurred, as it helped frame many of the issues with the youth and families with which I deal with in my clinical practice.

I travel extensively giving live workshops and lectures to healthcare professionals to train them in approaching and tackling these same issues. In another workshop a small group of six addiction therapists gathered with me to discuss ways to engage youth.

One attendee constantly checked texts and emails from the beginning of the meeting. As mentioned above, I always start with trying to set the "use of tech" guidelines. I was told by this person, "I'm sorry! This is just the way I am. I can't stop and I'll be doing this throughout the day." The other participants looked on with some horror at the 'in-your-face' demonstration that this problem can manifest anywhere, which has impacted the concepts of social norms and values.

Our reliance on communications and technology in the 21st century is not easy to define, as each situation is unique to the individual, regardless of age, location and other factors. The next section will focus on the important topic of the dangers lurking in the virtual world and through wireless communications.

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**REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

**Bombarded on all sides**

Take time to answer and reflect on the following:

1) How many forms/methods of communication are you currently using i.e. telephone voice, emails, texts, Twitter™, Instagram™, IM, etc.?
2) Which ones do you use the most and for what purposes?
3) What do you do with all the information you receive via these forms? Do you store them in long virtual lists, Outlook™ folders, print outs, voicemail boxes collecting cyberdust?
4) When was the last time you did a cyber-tidy of all the saved information/message content you possess? When was the last time you cleaned your screen desktop?

**Making Changes**

Take time to consider where you can build in a regular "clean up" time in your week: this time is for sorting and/or deleting all the gathered information you have collected.

Consider the need to use all the communication forms you currently employ. Are there some you might consider minimizing or removing completely? Are there some you maybe could be using more? Less is sometimes more - in this case, less routes of access to you may mean more efficient quality time for your use.
KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

Information overload can creep up through a variety of ways and for many reasons. Take stock of how much technology is impacting your daily "physical" life. It is possible to minimize the negative effects by being honest about how much of the information you receive is unnecessary and thus avoid excessive usage.

Understand that you are not alone - millions of people around the world swim in cyber each day. Overuse of technology is widespread; there is almost no one who is not exposed in some way to the cyber world. As such, there are resources available to help you to learn to recognize problems and create successful and effective strategies.

Take deliberate action to provide balance for yourself and your family. Learn (and watch for) signs of information overload ("drowning"). Define what guidelines you and your family need to achieve more healthy interaction with technology and be diligent in following the rules set in place.
Interlude: Tranquility under the Sea

As much as the Internet seems complex - the physical world is much more so. On the Net the rules are, to a degree, more explicit. This is soothing for many people. For some, navigating in a cyberworld where rules are clearer or where rules can be looked up can provide a feeling of mastery that is lacking in the real, physical world. The trouble is when the virtual world becomes much more valuable and important to be "in" than interfacing with the physical world.
Part 4

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT: Real Impact of Virtual Worlds

This section covers the following topics:

• Virtual worlds can and do effect the real world physically, financially, and politically
• Videogames and online games are also media carriers of opinions, values, judgements, and other messages
• Things to consider when letting virtual worlds into your physical home

Below is a letter written to Dear Abby, a popular advice column in the United States, which has offered advice to readers for generations.

"DEAR ABBY: Over the past few years, as social media has become more popular, I have noticed a trend among many people. They now favour that form of communication over personal human interaction. This is especially true of my girlfriend of five years.

We have normal relationship problems I feel could be addressed, but from the moment she gets home from work she's in front of the computer playing Facebook games, posting status updates, or messaging "friends." She sits there for hours, lost in her virtual world. We rarely talk anymore, and when we do, it turns into an argument because I'm trying to discuss what I see is a serious problem.

The Internet and social media are great tools for bringing worlds together, if they are not abused. But, for many people, I think, social media is doing more harm than good. It has depersonalized human contact and has the potential to destroy relationships and isolate individuals.

I'm interested in your opinion and any advice you can give me on helping my girlfriend understand my concerns. - ALONE IN THE REAL WORLD."

Where are we heading?

At one time or another, most of us have probably experienced a friend or family member engrossed in technology to the extreme.

As we discussed in the previous section, it is important that you are honest in assessing your habits and behaviours. Just how important are your connections? Do you find yourself indulging in such behaviours? Do you post on Facebook™, LinkedIn™, Twitter™, and Instagram™ every moment of your life on a daily basis, or more than once a day? Are you continually checking your friend list or Facebook™ status or updates, even though you just checked five minutes ago?

As clinicians, the challenge has also edged its way into the field of mental health. You don't have to be a professional to realize that today's society has been
completely overwhelmed with technology, media, and the concept of messaging. Many of us have numbly accepted the situation, but it doesn't help any of us understand or deal with potential overuse or misuse.

"We are the WTF generation: Wikipedia, Twitter and Facebook."
-Antonymous

This way of assessment can be considered the classic mind set of Generation Z\(^{18}\) and if left unchecked, future generations as well.

It has been said that it takes a community to raise a child. They likely meant that there were numerous healthy relationships and connections of a personal nature that allowed the young, as well as the adults, to have support and learn values. In modern times, many cultures still embrace this and even Hilary Clinton published a book on raising children entitled "It takes a Village" (2005). Yet, there appears to be a major crisis with the rising tides of virtual communities and social media groups.

Our society has become fragmented and the community family bonds have eroded in competition with present and immediately available virtual worlds. Strangely enough, the virtual world has spawned numerous e-communities and, while there are many boons to having virtual relationships, they cannot replace physical relationships completely. In the physical world, family, friends and neighbours are more available (and capable) to instil healthy connections than "virtual families" composed of people whose values and motives may not be in the user's best interest. This is not to say virtual communities cannot provide some forms of support - but they are not a replacement for the traditional communities consisting of flesh and blood extended family and friends.

In my own practice, I've seen people find others via game platforms, and similar connection devices, to form relationships that led to the consideration of marriage with others. In some cases, the other person was already married with children and wanted to escape with another. Additionally, there exists the inevitable incompatibility when relating in person outside of the cyber world of e-dating.

It would be a mistake to think that relationships developed online are not real; they are real and impact the lives of individuals in many ways. And this is where observation, wisdom and discernment become extremely important. Sadly, too many have been harmed in some way from involvement in dangerous or extreme cyber relationships and connections. Such harm can come in a wide range from financial harm, emotional, ethical and social issues, or even physical danger.

I just want to say that there are those who do find workable healthy relationships using the Internet. This is becoming a very common way to meet people and try things out before an in-person connection. Like everything, the key is how to navigate online relationships and those in the real world in healthy ways.

And lest we make the mistake of thinking that only the young or uneducated can face such dangers, think about how much money is spent by adults on gaming, gambling, pornography, shopping and other online activities. If taken to the extreme, these activities can wreak havoc in the lives of adults.
I cannot emphasize enough the need to continually ask yourself the hard questions about your own online activities, including how long you are online playing games, gambling, social networking, and dating. Doing so will reveal if you have a healthy and safe balance, or if you need to work toward creating one to model such behaviours to the young people in your life.

I keep coming back to this because in my own experience in counselling sessions, seminars or meetings I have witnessed someone performing one action or another on their cell phone in the middle of the session. I often wonder if those individuals have young ones in their home who look to them as an example of how to manage technology. Let's examine a few cyber activities, which require caution.

1. **Finances**

I do not have to go into much explanation about the damage that can be done to finances through online gambling. The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) -among other resources - report alarming statistics about online gambling addiction.\[19\]

Also, consider the millions of dollars spent each year to access devices, connect to the Internet, the cost of devices themselves (especially with bigger, brighter and better versions coming out every couple of days), in addition to the "extras" that are sold to keep people in touch with the latest and greatest gadget, widget or software.

Then there are the tons of games for youth, which seem (and may be, if controlled) harmless. Some of the games involve taking care of cyber-pets just like real pets...feeding, grooming, and socializing. However, the needs of the pets are taken care of with points - points that are paid for by the parents. And since some of the essential needs that include feeding the pets when they are "hungry" and providing "virtual pet healthcare" if they are sick, how hard would it be to refuse a child the money needed to pay for their needy cyber companion? I hope a parent would refuse; yet I hear about how many give in to their children's demands, as they do not want their son or daughter to feel sad! However, being a parent isn't about making your kids feel happy all the time; rather it's raising them with healthy values and teaching them how to be aware of the limits and realities of life.

2. **Emotional Hazards**

It is clear to see that emotional manipulation may be involved in games that involve children needing money to care for their "pet". Other emotional dangers can be the heartbreak of rejection and ridicule from cyber bullying, or the pain of romantic relationships created on the Internet that do not work out for many number of reasons, including finding out that someone is not the person they portrayed online.

While certainly not true in all cases, as some people have made healthy connections and relationships on the Internet, social media does open up other
people's lives to the whole world, including feelings and intimate thoughts - which could lead to harm. At real risk of emotional harm are individuals who are unable to leave their home due to illness or injury, as well as isolated and lonely people of any age, and vulnerable young people looking for acceptance, to name a few.

Make no mistake about it, virtual relationships pack a powerful and real punch. Our virtual communications and social media in general have a huge impact on how we develop relationships these days. Whether you're a "gamer", looking for love, or just carrying on with friends, we recognize the importance of technology and connectivity in all age groups today. This cyber connection is also evident in the fervour with which people speak about their devices, or the enthusiasm they display when a new version of their favourite device or game update is released.

3. Social and Ethical Dangers-Video Games

Some of the most popular games played by teens, young adults and even older individuals involve what is known as "first person" shooting. In these violent games, the player spends hours on end participating in "adventures" such as killing and maiming others with the most dangerous weapons known to humankind. Players can even blow themselves up in a suicide mission. If they learn the correct strategy, all manner of intense violence is possible, and even encouraged. Most players connect to other players in locations around the world via the Internet and play and "converse" via instant messaging within the game while playing. In addition to these pro-violence messages, racism, sexism, and stereotypes are highly embedded in many gaming and other virtual platforms of the cyber world.

The games that are based on vehicle theft and other illegal activities are just as dangerous as those that teach stereotyping. They also are similar to simulations that help desensitize people towards violence. Statistically, games that focus on violence and sex are the top sellers worldwide. As players become immune/build tolerance to these virtual activities, developers work hard to make sure the next version is even more bloody, sexual and deviant.

For example, there is, seriously, a game that was developed in Japan called Rapelay™. It's a game where an individual can rape young schoolgirls on subway trains. You don't believe it? Go ahead, put this book/or your e-reader down for a minute and "Google" it. What do you think about such a game?

You are not alone if you've ever purchased what you believed would be a fun or adventurous game and it turned out to contain some of the same behaviours as mentioned in the games above. Caution is key.

The majority of games in the 21st century are not the games of old like Life™, Monopoly™, and backgammon. They are, however, highly sophisticated, interactive simulated worlds that can have direct impact on value systems. Even in simulation, one can begin to experience saturation, desensitization, exposure to and participation in violence, lying, aggression, sex, and illegal activity which have, and will continue to be, spilled into our society.

And unfortunately, unlike cigarette packets on which the tobacco industry is now
forced to put warning labels, the real dangers of these interactive games possessing misogynistic, racist, violent content have not been put on video game packages. Perhaps soon they might carry the warning, "May be addictive and/or have hazardous effects to your moral compass."

4. Physical Danger

This has occurred when virtual connections turn into real connections in a potentially unsafe manner, such as adults posing as children or online dating or socializing with an emotionally imbalanced person.

In fact, there are also ways that media can encourage copycat behaviours in those learning from the various actions of others. An extreme example: most news outlets don't publish details of suicides; when stories of suicides are published online they have the potential to spawn a wave of other deaths.

Sadly, the Internet has become a convenient catalyst for just about anyone to read details of (and in some cases view) suicides anywhere in the world 24 hours a day. Even more devastating is that the numbers of suicides are rapidly increasing. A mere few examples include a 14-year-old boy in Buffalo, New York who kept secret cyber bullying he had been experiencing. He did not tell his parents or friends. This teen authored a hidden blog that expressed his increasing ruminations about bullying, homophobia and suicide. It was only after he hanged himself that his plight became known and he gained media coverage. Many journalists, activists and the singer Lady Gaga (whom he wrote about frequently) expressed sadness and outrage at yet another young life lost due to cyber bullying. The issue goes beyond just cyber bullying - media may influence a person to consider self-harm or suicide in many ways.

The morbid phrase "Facebook Suicide Effect" was coined as the result of a 32-year-old man who hung himself after updating his profile on the social media site with a statement that said he thought death was better than living. He was found dead three hours later.

As another example, the suicide of a teenage bodybuilder made headlines around the world. He posted on a bodybuilding forum that he felt inadequate and unloved and then, with his web cam rolling, took pills, lay on his bed and died. Forum members continued to post insults at the young man as he lay dead, believing he was faking. It was only after the police arrived (camera still rolling) that the sad reality was revealed.

A common denominator in these and other suicides is that the victims had posted messages that they had suicidal thoughts. But far too often, people who read the posts, including forum moderators, did nothing to investigate until it was too late. It does raise the question regarding peoples' responsibilities online?

Allow me to take this time to once again state that there are numerous advantages to having access to technology today in unlimited ways. This section of the book is by no means trying to strike fear in the hearts and minds of the readers. I am not a "cyber bogeyman" who takes pleasure in scaring technology savvy people. Most likely, you are already aware of what is written here, and
hopefully this serves to remind you to continually monitor what and how often we are at risk of exposure to unhealthy or unsafe online activities.

**Sample Family Guidelines**

Use this table as a quick reference for sample ways to handle 3 common themes when it comes to the safe use of technology in your home.

**Time Management/ Communication**

Have a "no digital media" rule for the dinner table, family time, or in certain scenarios. Children and teens must learn how to blend their virtual and real worlds together without over emphasizing their reliance on the Internet or on their media connections.

Maintain open lines of communication (face-to-face) and discuss the benefits as well as impact and potential dangers that come with utilizing the wireless world. Remind your children and teens that once something is posted on the Internet, it can't be taken back. It will spread like wildfire. Bottom line: There's no such thing as privacy on the Internet.

Start teaching children early the proper manners when using today's technical devices. Just as we were taught manners when it came to being considerate, instruct your young ones not to use their devices while doing business, at the movies, or during job interviews.

**Awareness**

Stay in the habit of being as aware as possible regarding family device uses, access and activities. That goes for cell phones, smartphones, and tablets as well, as many of these devices are Internet compatible.

Become familiar with popular video games, activities, and access to communications today. Set ground rules for your children at a very early age and they're likely to stick to it as they grow. Know what you're talking about, and your kids are more likely to pay attention to you.

Watch for signs that you or anyone in your family, is getting close to unacceptable behaviour, such as changes in functioning, mood, etc.

**Security**

If children or teens are not utilizing the Internet or media in positive ways, or in ways that you approve, don't be afraid to cut off access.

Adjust settings, which enable passwords that set administration rights on home-based computers and networks.

Have an "open door policy" when it comes to your family being on the online device. In other words keep the door open when they are online or at least let them know you will be coming in the room unannounced to check in on them.

Don't forget to modify the above for older children - and that they need to be considered applied as appropriate to you as well!
REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

Discuss Creating a Cyber Guideline for the Home

In your own home, please determine the family values and guidelines for the use of cyber technology where you live. If they do not exist, consider developing them. If guidelines are in place, discuss whether they are being followed. Why is this important? Explicit is better than implicit. Some areas of discussion can include: Should cyber tech be used during meals? During family outings? Where should it be used? What is appropriate content? Access? Who pays for it? What are the time limits?

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

The virtual world has a very real impact on reality through dating, peer pressure, friendships, and family dynamics. We must learn to work with the virtual world in conjunction with our reality, and teach ourselves that just because we have instant access to such technologies we should not forget our common sense and decency in the way we treat ourselves and others.

Never lose sight of the dangers lurking behind virtual interfaces. Also, be aware that it is easy to cause harm to ourselves and others through our virtual media behaviours.
Interlude: Deep Sea Dangers

A few more Swimming in Cyber metaphors for your consideration:

- Net Nitrogen Narcosis: Nitrogen Narcosis - aka raptures of the deep or the Martini effect, which is caused by the depth pressures and its effect on particular gases. This condition causes a person to become intoxicated, similar to drinking alcohol. Frequent deep dives into cyber can put you at risk for developing an addiction and the loss of control over the ability to set limits, build tolerance, and lose judgment over one's actions in the cyber.

- The Binary Bends - coming up too quickly from a dive can cause pressure issues called the 'bends', requiring placement in a special pressure chamber to acclimate to regular sea level pressures. This can also occur with tech use in which withdrawal effects can be quite painful. For example, suddenly stopping cyber gaming and gambling. Sometimes a gradual reduction and special care is recommended to help support the person through the transition rather than going "cold turkey!"

- Denizens of the Digital Deep - who knows what lurks down at the depths? As with the comment on sharks in this section, hackers, drug dealers, organized crime, and others have set up ways to use the Net for their operations.

- Hypertext Hypothermia - Or, just like losing body heat when in the waters too long, people absorbed in their cyber behaviours may neglect their physical needs, such as lose weight (muscle as well as fat), hygiene, and more.
CAPSIZED: When is "it" a problem? Is this an... "Addiction"?

This section covers the following topics:

- Definitions of Addiction
- Seeking the forces that drive problematic behaviours
- Pitfalls and dangers of stereotypes and stigma

Now comes *that* word: addiction. Many of us associate addiction with bad health habits such as drinking, smoking, or drug use. We may or may not know someone who has a gambling addiction, an addiction to porn, or other potentially addictive behaviours. Do you know a 'shopaholic', or someone who just has to take care of their farm on Farmville™ or they're going to get peeved? Are these behaviours created equal? No. Are they potentially harmful? Yes, in very different ways and for different reasons. However, sweeping everyone with problematic behaviours associated with the Internet as "Internet addicted" really just confuses the situation. What really is the person doing and what drives that behaviour?

First, let's define some parameters. Reliance on communication as well as technology can ultimately have its own set of mental and physical effects on the human body.

**Addiction**

How does 'addiction' relate to misuse or over reliance on our communication devices, the Internet, or social media? Use whatever words you want to describe this phenomenon, but the concept of addiction is not limited to physical substance abuses.

"Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.

Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death."[24]

Many of us have come to rely on our technological devices and the World Wide Web, even though it wasn't even in most people's homes in the early 1990s. In
fact, many video games are themselves reliant on the Internet, as are shopping venues - from department stores to grocery food outlets.

We find dates and love on the Internet, make friends and un-friend friends on Facebook™. It’s common today to download movies and television shows on the Net. Everything we need is available at the click of a mouse and we’ve come to rely on it as part of our existence.

Today, college degrees are available on the Internet. I am not saying that there’s anything wrong with that, but it is just an example how things have changed. Students today find nothing odd about the fact that eventually, school might become an entirely online endeavour; no need to visit a campus, interact (in person) with an instructor or professor except via webinars.

While this is all well and good (especially for those who just can’t make it to a physical campus because of distance, obligations or responsibilities) where does that leave us when it comes to learning how to deal with others in a social setting?

**Over-reliance?**

We perform huge aspects of our lives through media communications. We transfer funds from one account to another from our smartphones, pay our bills online or with our digital devices, and we rely on technology to get us through the day. What? Write a check? Put a stamp on it and physically mail it? Unheard of anymore! Do you know that many college age students today don’t know how to write a check or physically balance a chequebook?

Have you ever left for work or school or an errand only to realize that you left your cell phone at home and then turned around to go back and get it?

Do you even consider exercising, jogging, or even taking the dog for a walk without listening to your iPod or making sure your phone is in your pocket?

Sure, many of us rely on our devices to do our jobs, and our online/tech is essential, no doubt about it. We’ve gone from paper to digital. Your medical records are now digital. Your bank records are now digital. The potential problem is, without digital access to information, much of our history, which used to be available on paper, is almost no longer available! Some may say this is better for the environment as we will save more trees. However, since emails came into use, the use of paper has increased! It seems many people like to print their e-communications and documents into physical form.

Technology is not so slowly encroaching on many of our generational traditions, and like it or not, there may come a day when you don’t have a choice of doing things ‘the old way’. In some cases this may be great - in others, not so wonderful. The issue is the speed at which the changes are occurring, and making sure we do not lose those important things that give us values and meaning along the way. For many of us, the thought of going through a day, a week, or even a month without access to our communication devices is unthinkable. When our computers or communication devices malfunction, we
panic.

We do rely on digital and electronic technology and communication as part of our 21st-century lives. For instance, when you watch television in the evening, is your cell phone always within view or reach? How many times have you texted or responded to texts during your favourite television show, or do you wait until the commercials? So I guess the question is: When did we get to the point where we couldn't function without our cyber connections?

At this point in time, the American Psychiatric Association doesn't mention "technology addiction" as a specified mental pathology, but how do you answer the question whether you're "addicted" or whether you have an over reliance or attachment to technology and communications?

Did you know that in China, over two million people have been diagnosed with "technological addiction” and that there are actually clinics throughout China and Korea to treat it? Actually, the concept of addiction to the Internet does not stand alone, but may often be a symptom of other issues, including anxiety and depression.

Today, it's not uncommon to find computers or other communication devices in kindergartens and in the hands of pre-schoolers. We find them popping out in the most unlikely of places, including church, funerals, weddings, and ceremonies.

We are only beginning to understand the impact this has on society at large. Various reports indicate that smartphones are actually starting to become pseudo-extensions of the actual human brain and reduce the part of the brain that controls spatial orientation and memory management. This is not hard to believe, considering that smartphones today have features that "understand" what the user says - and they can even talk back to assure (or reassure?) users that requests were understood. Like any technology, such features are under constant development to make them faster, and in some cases "smarter", than the brain that the human user was born with. With good reason, there are concerns that these tools have the effect of offloading mental function to the device - causing an extreme drop in cerebral function and capacity.

Do we rely too heavily on technology and communications? The simple answer is probably "yes". The not so simple answer is determining the reasons. Some people's reliance on cyber communications and the virtual world are much more extreme than others, and understanding what drives one person to such extremes is not always easy to define. What is important is that each individual, including you and me, take a step back and assess our own reliance and use of not only social media, but also communication utilizing technology and digital advancements.

How often do you "come up for air" as you swim in the cyber? We're not talking about situations of regular work hours or expected school assignments. We are talking about extra usage outside of school, the workplace, or the business environment.
**What drives "Addictive" Behaviours?**

Please note that I am not saying that everybody who gambles online, shops, or plays games online is headed in the "wrong" direction. My intent is merely to emphasize - again - that you or anyone else in your circle of family and/or friends should be aware of their own habits when it comes to your virtual environment. It's time to engage in a bit of self-discipline and self-reflection in determining the boundaries. As I discussed earlier; the waters are jam-packed with busy, eager (but in many cases, naïve) swimmers. Many people engage in these behaviours to various degrees.

Instead of functional use of technology, I am going to focus on when people have crossed the line to the extent that the behaviours have now created a negative impact on the person's life and/or on their circle of family and friends.

Some of the most common areas where 'problems' may occur are online:

- Gambling
- Shopping
- Gaming
- Pornography
- Entertainment

Again, I'm not suggesting that engaging in any of the above will guide you into a downward spiral or get you into trouble - but - and it's a big 'but' - the boundaries often get blurred the more time you spend online engaged in such activities.

**Words and labels**

Internet addiction. Video game addiction.

What do those two phrases mean to you, and what kind of images do they conjure up? Do you imagine a solitary youth hunkering down in the basement glued to a video screen? I know one of the first things that comes into my mind is a *South Park* episode where the kids from the television show are playing *World of Warcraft*™ in their basement; skipping school, ignoring their hygiene, and their health.

I would like to take a moment to discuss the term Internet/videogame addiction. The term isn't very useful at all because it's filled with elements of stigma. The term is too broad in a clinical sense, and is associated with concurrent health issues and behaviours. Not only that, but many of us use the term to define any type of behaviour that implies an extreme fondness for something.

So let's start with the Internet and video games...

When you think of the terms mentioned below, what do you imagine?

- Gaming
- Virtual world role-playing
- Surfing for porn
• Online gambling
• Messaging and/or texting
• On-line shopping

These activities may have certain similarities, but each offers a wide variety of differences. For example, if someone is overindulging in such behaviours, what is it that is or has caused that indulgence? For example, is Joe really fixated on building characters in a role-playing game, or is he playing the game to develop "friends" and relationships in the virtual world and in gaming chat rooms that he can't in real life?

Let's play a game. Below you'll find a list of Internet behaviours as well as possible reasons for engaging in such behaviour. Mix and match the behaviour with a 'cause/contributing factor'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Contributing Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online shopping</td>
<td>Marital discord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twittering</td>
<td>Posttraumatic stress disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online team wore games</td>
<td>Online T team wore games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New immigrant country</td>
<td>Single player strategy games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single player strategy games</td>
<td>Loss of faith in a higher power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspiracy theory web browsing</td>
<td>Conspiracy theory web browsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low serotonin levels</td>
<td>Conspiracy theory web browsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's cyber-pet gaming</td>
<td>Conspiracy theory web browsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual identity issues</td>
<td>Conspiracy theory web browsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive streaming video sex trade</td>
<td>Conspiracy theory web browsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Conspiracy theory web browsing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, how did you do? Answers are at the end of this section.

I don't really care for the word "addiction" because, as I said before, in the non-clinical definition it brings with it a large amount of stigma. However, in cases such as we're exploring here, it's the most apt for explaining certain behaviours. In our case, it's not so much the terminology that's important as is encouraging individuals who think they have a problem to get some help - without worrying about the internal and even social stigma that comes along with the term.

What does it mean to be...

• a TV addict
• a running addict
• a work addict
• a workout addict
• a coffee addict
• a sports addict
• a drug addict
• a gambling addict

Substitute any type of word you want for "addict"; junkie, connoisseur, aficionado, you name it; most of us are "addicted" to something if you want to use the word that way - but that is the danger. The clinical sense would mean you truly have problems with the behaviour to the extent that it impacts you in some functional way. Yet the word is thrown about in ways that can promote stigma that creates barriers for people to get help.

The point here is that stigma is stigma, and the term "addict" often brings along with it connotations of extremely negative behaviours, when in reality, many of our "addictions" seem perfectly harmless and innocent to us.

For example, the other day, a mother (in the presence of her daughter) said, "My daughter is a computer addict. And we know what an addict is. A manipulative liar who will do anything to get her way. Just like all addicts." I asked if her daughter had started to lie and manipulate at home. "No," said the mother. "But she will, as she is an addict... all addicts lie and manipulate, don't they?"

How does that statement sound to you? Harsh? Untrue? The fact is the word "addict" or "addicted" carries along with it meanings associated with other behaviours and conditions that have been portrayed in negative ways in popular culture for years.

Think about this: Why does the mother consider the child mentioned above a computer addict? Could it be possible that the child has a learning disorder that led to the person using the Net for a coping strategy? Was she born into a family of high achievers who never really had any expectations of her success? Is the child dealing with depression because the family doesn't show emotion, or has she been bullied for being overweight? Or is she swimming alone, without a lifeguard, guidance or the proper equipment in the deep end of the cyber world?

As you can see, it's important to ask questions that determine why people engage in certain behaviours, including those on the Internet. There are no simple answers. As human beings, each of us is complex and unique, and the same goes for behaviours and reasons for those behaviours.

Here are the answers to that table where you did the mix-and-match:

Actually, there is no correct answer! You can step back and imagine how many behaviours listed can result from many of those activities.

As in clinical practices such as mine, you'll find a number of combinations
contribute to a number of these behaviours. Sometimes, three or four behaviours can contribute to one or more Internet "addictions".

We have to be aware of the stigma that is attached to many Internet behaviours, as well as behaviours that may be a result of or dependent on emotional, mental, and physical issues. There is not always one simple correct answer or diagnosis for why someone engages in certain types of behaviour online. That's what makes each one of us so unique, for better or worse.

What is Addiction?

Many people think addiction is something that happens because a person puts powerful psychoactive substances in their body. How can cyber-space behaviours be considered addictive? Problems with gambling, gaming, Internet use, sex, shopping and other behaviours are sometimes described as "addictions." The term is not just a handy metaphor; science and clinical experience support its use.

Mental health professionals use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to help determine diagnoses. The Manual moved problem gambling under the heading of addictive disorders. The First (2010) reports from one of the DSM-5 diagnosis-related research planning conferences state:

Some core components of addictive behaviour include continuing the behaviour despite negative consequences and inability to control or stop engagement in the behaviour.

DSM-5 further defines addictive behaviour as an irresistible urge or appetite to engage in the behaviour. Such behaviours can go beyond substance use to things like gambling, sex, shopping, eating, and computer use. Whether to classify these disorders as addictions, compulsive disorders or impulse control disorders is a matter of ongoing scientific debate.

A person with true addictive behaviour usually has few coping options. Ultimately, whatever problems they faced initially become worse as they try to address, soothe, or avoid them by engaging in the behaviours.

For instance, take online gambling addiction. A cycle develops in which ongoing problems are intensified as the person loses money and then scrambles to win back the money they lost. As noted in the paragraph above, often the addiction is a way to cope with other problems. In the case of gambling, commonly, financial crisis (which gets worse with gambling) is the initial issue that brings someone with a gambling problem into treatment.

For example, shopping addiction may bring financial crises that have little potential for replacing lost funds. The cycle in this case includes fear over mounting debt, the loss of alternative activities and the loss of self-respect. In the case of video gaming, isolation and loss of "real-world" social skills and networks are common elements of the addiction cycle.

The addictive cycle can intensify a problem to severe levels, but not always. Addictive behaviours (substance-based or not) exist on a continuum, with severe
addictive behaviour at one end and behavioural health at the other. There is no definitive point at which "normal" levels of the behaviour end and problem levels begin. At-risk and moderate levels not only exist, but also in some cases can continue for years. Many people resolve their problematic behaviour patterns without treatment. Progression is by no means inevitable.

Social and cultural factors influence the perceived location of the behaviour on this "continuum". For example, what is regarded as normative (as opposed to excessive or problematic) sexual behaviour changes over time, and varies widely from one social or cultural group to another. Thus, each person should be approached individually regarding concerns about negative impacts of the behaviour and assessment of actual harm. This will avoid judgment of a behaviour based on personal or cultural bias.

Internet use has also become ubiquitous. The amount of time people spend online has increased rapidly with the advent of new technologies. What used to be seen as excessive is now "normal" behaviour, particularly since the Internet has become so integrated with our day-to-day lives. However, normal does not always mean healthy!

Internet use is increasingly difficult to avoid (and increasingly easier to access) and is integral to many other behavioural addictions, including online gaming, online gambling, social networking, pornography surfing and online sexual behaviour. This is especially true for people who are vulnerable to these types of behaviours.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

In this section, the reflective activities take the form of a question and answer session—with you as the sole participant. Your honest answers will be the catalyst to going deeper into the process. So... go ahead - interrogate yourself!

Oftentimes, I find it helpful to take a self-assessment by asking myself questions and then answering them (it's okay to talk and answer to yourself, particularly in this context). Ask (then answer) yourself:

• What is my definition of addictive behaviour (in anything, not just cyber usage)?
• What impact does the Internet have on my family members and me when it comes to our ability to take care of our responsibilities and obligations?
• Where do I most use media devices, and how much time do I spend doing it?
• Do I take my cell phone everywhere I go, even to the bathroom?
• Do I 'freak out' when I leave my device at home or in my car by mistake?
• Do I feel 'disconnected' from the world if I don't have access to wireless connections or hotspots?
• Do I actually turn down vacation venues or opportunities because I won't
"have access"?

• Do my children or I log on to the Internet excessively?
• Would I be willing to find out and help resolve the reasons why a family member or I may demonstrate addictive behaviours?

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KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

You know yourself, your family and your household dynamics and habits better than anyone. Or do you? Is there balance in your life? Are there clues of problematic behaviours or habits and other issues that you can work on that will result in healthier technology use?

Words and phrases have stigmas attached that may hinder people from getting the help they need. It is the behaviour, not the word (addiction, overuse, fixation, etc.) that determines whether a problem exists. Try to watch for unsafe behaviours rather than placing labels.

Although the topic of this book is cyber behaviours and does discuss possible other "addictions", be mindful that every human alive is vulnerable to imbalance in any type of behaviours (shopping, drinking, and sex, to name a few). Please feel free to take the tips and advice offered here and apply it to your life or anyone you know who may be at risk.
**Interlude: Marine Scanning and Charting**

Good swimmers also try to study the layout of the water bodies they swim in. They check for obstacles and currents and other potential hazards. They look for landmarks or buoys; by doing all of these things they create lines for direction and navigation.

So too must we take the time to understand the basics of what technology allows us to do and where it can lead us. We can’t just say, "It’s too much work and there are too many things to learn!" Well, you could say that but then you will be in danger of drowning or being stuck on a deserted island, so to speak.

One does not need to know EVERYTHING, as that is impossible. However it is quite important to understand what the Internet is, the ways people communicate, and its potential benefits as well as hazards ("technology literacy" some call it). It is possible to read up on it but one also needs to "dive" into the cyber world to get the experience that books/texts cannot provide.

Keep in mind what Confucius wrote a long time before cyberspace came along, yet is still true today:

"By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and Third by experience, which is the bitterest."

Learn how to set limits, set alarms, and learn to recognize a scam email with a Trojan virus. We are all learning together constantly. So swim along!
Part 6

BRAIN WAVES & MIND CURRENTS: Neurobiology & Mental Health

This section covers the following topics:

- The biology of behaviour
- Behaviours and brain cross-impact
- The strong associations of mental health and addiction with cyber behaviours

Waves of gray

One function of the brain includes a tract consisting of pathways that affect motivational and emotional responses. This area in the brain has also been identified in moderating pleasure responses. The release of dopamine (a chemical in the brain sometimes referred to as one of the "feel good" or "happy" chemicals) has been shown to affect the reinforcing properties of substances such as alcohol and cocaine as well as gambling, computer gaming and other risk-taking and highly repetitive behaviours.

Repeated exposure to an "addictive" reinforcer (the object of the "addiction") causes the brain to shift priorities that will bias future behaviour toward the addictive reinforcer (Olsen, 2011).

Most non-drug reinforcers lose their ability to release dopamine as they become more familiar. However, certain non-drug reinforcers, such as gambling and gaming, offer the opportunity for indefinite dopamine release because the delivery of rewards is never entirely predictable (Fiorillo et al., 2003). In fact, delivery of unpredicted rewards is the natural event that instigates dopamine release (Schultz, 1998).

As such, gambling or gaming enables on-going and unlimited opportunities for dopamine release by the delivery of rewards that, although hoped for, are never fully predicted. Sex, shopping, and multiple sources of credit can become addictive in the age of the Internet because of unlimited access to novelty.

In males, the ability to activate dopamine is reinstated by a new sexual partner even during the sexual refractory period (the so-called "Coolidge effect;" see Beach & Jordan, 1956). With the Internet, one can have "encounters" (sexual gratification) with multiple partners in the space of minutes. With each new partner, dopamine fires again, reinforcing the behaviour that would otherwise naturally satiate or extinguish over time.

Similarly, Internet shopping permits virtually limitless opportunities to encounter novel ways to obtain products and services with a click of a BUY IT NOW button. Thus, speed and ease of access permit ongoing, frequent exposure to novel...
rewards. Each of these rewards are capable of causing dopamine release, not by directly engaging dopamine neurons (like drugs), but by engaging the natural process designed to activate dopamine, that is, novel reward delivery.

Addictive behaviour and neurobiology are strongly interactive, in that brain structures, chemistry and neural pathways influence not only behaviour, but also change in response to experience. So it is in some cases difficult to say whether differences in brain structure and functioning are a cause or a result of addictive behaviour. This dynamic interactivity is one aspect of why addiction is so complex; it combines the neurological level with the psychological and social systems in which each person is embedded.

**Currents of the mind**

Both clinical experience and research indicate a strong co-occurrence between mental disorders and behavioural addictions. For example, data from the 2009 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) indicates that young people who are gambling problematically are also at higher risk for depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, psychological distress and suicide attempts (Cook et al., 2010).

The prevalence of drug use, truancy, gang involvement and delinquency are also markedly elevated in this group. The OSDUHS examined co-occurrence and not causality; thus research has not made it clear whether, for example, depression causes behavioural addiction or vice versa, or whether both are caused by other factors. What is clear is that in youth, excessive gambling tends to be associated with multiple problems. Such problems tend to exacerbate one another. However, a good assessment will often clarify causality in individual cases, and is an important consideration in clinical work.

There is particularly strong evidence of co-occurring trauma and mental health and addiction disorders among women. In a sample of 365 women with untreated gambling problems, Boughton and Brewster (2002) found histories of co-occurring disorders and trauma as follows:

- sought treatment for mental health concerns: 71%
- suicide attempts: 29%
- physical abuse: 46%
- sexual abuse: 38%
- binge eating: 27%
- shopping addiction: 24%

Garcia and Thibaut (2010) identify mood and anxiety disorders and substance use disorders as most commonly co-occurring with sexual addictions. Kaplan and Krueger (2010) found correlations between personality disorders and paraphilias (abnormal sexual fantasies, urges or behaviours). Kuzma and Black (2006) found that shopping addiction tends to co-occur with mood, substance use and eating disorders. Evidence also suggests that both genetic and
environmental factors induce brain alterations that increase susceptibility to behavioural addictions. For example, impulsivity is a risk factor, as is the disturbance of early attachments (Vazquez et al., 2005).

Addictive behaviours frequently act as coping strategies for underlying mental health and stress-related problems. Clinical experience suggests, for example, that excessive Internet use may be strategy related to coping mechanics of many disorders. For example:

- Asperger's Syndrome (a form of autism now subsumed under the Autistic Spectrum Disorder condition in DSM-5) may create a drive to learn everything about a topic by constantly researching it online.
- People with social anxiety may feel more able to socialize in chat rooms and role-play gaming worlds than in real life.
- People may use the Internet to enhance their mood when depressed.
- People with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) may use the Internet to deal with contamination fears by limiting real-world involvement.
- Sexual addiction may involve long hours seeking and downloading pornography.
- Self-harm behaviours can be supported in online chat rooms where people share thoughts and techniques on suicide and other self-harm behaviours such as cutting, burning and disordered eating.
- Internet use may enable online extramarital affairs and thus exacerbate relationship issues.

In other words, these behaviours can serve many purposes, and have complex relationships with other concurrent issues. Patterns of concurrence may be seen more or less frequently, but there are no simple causes to point to for any specific problem behaviour.

Excessive behaviour can serve many purposes depending on the individual. Therapists and other clinical professionals must explore the meanings and functions of the behaviour for each person, and understand how these relate to other issues and disorders.

For people with very complex issues, this exploration may take some time and patience. There are certain issues that require more attention, such as if the person has had problems with attachments to people (such as parents and friends) in early childhood. Please see the LIFEGUARDING section for when professional help might be considered.

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**REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

Internet issues may be tied into biological processes. Does this alter or change how you view these conditions? Many behavioural problems involving cyber are associated with mental health issues. Do you think part of the issues of not
seeking help are due to people being afraid of being "labelled" and mental health stigma issues?

If you like to express your thoughts in writing, write a one page free-flowing thought reflection on what the above questions evoke within you. Otherwise, spend some time reflecting on the above questions in some other form, e.g. a discussion with family or friends.

_____

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

There are biological factors to behavioural issues, problems and addictions. Addictions are not "moral" weaknesses or other stereotypical stigmatic concepts blaming the person for "deciding" to be the way he or she is.

Of course, once a person understands that there might be biological factors influencing their behaviours, it is up to them to take steps to try to deal with any behaviours that are affecting them negatively. For example, if someone has ADHD and was aware of this yet refused to get treatment despite it being a driving force for a behavioural addiction - yes, that person does bear responsibility in such choices.

Mental health problems are frequently connected in some way to behavioural addictions. Regardless if the behaviours developed in a response to the mental health problems or the other way around - if both are present, both need to be dealt with.
Interlude: Other Cyber swimming Safety Considerations

A few more metaphoric nuggets for you to reflect upon:

"Wait 30 minutes after eating before swimming" or, "Make sure you take appropriate breaks for nourishment and digestion rather than eat in front of a computer and get ketchup all over a tablet!"

"Twenty minutes maximum in a hot tub;" or too much of anything, even pleasurable activities, becomes a health risk - even if you are having fun surfing, reading, and playing games.

"No diving into a shallow pool" or other risky behaviours often do lead to horrible consequences - such as sharing personal information online with strangers, sending explicit photos of oneself through a text, posting risqué photos on Facebook or similar. They can come back to harm a person in many ways!

"No running around the pool" or "slippery when wet" - learning to keep oneself in check or slowing down doing certain behaviours (such as tweeting excessively all night), using money (online shopping sprees, for example), integrity (as in descending into posting in a "flame war" on a chat site), sending a job-related email (note: DO NOT SEND THAT EMAIL IN ANGER!).

"Do not enter the water due to high levels of E. Coli!" Yes, you might see signs like that on a beach where the water purity is not safe for swimming. Similar too are the areas where you get the "Download this Free Software from Unknown Land that will fix your computer!" and the "Open the ZIP file for reading about the millions you can win!" and so on. These can cause numerous viruses to enter your computer and other technological devices.

"Beware of Sharks!" (Or, a variant I once saw in Cuba I loved - "Beware of Jellyfish!")): Or, "Beware the numerous con artists, identity thieves, predators, and worse that float waiting for victims in the depths!"

Consider wearing a "diving cap!" Just like public healthcare recommends condoms in certain contexts for sexual behaviours, so to should one consider setting up some protection from the lures of the ubiquitous sexual content and interactive sites rampant throughout the Net. These include calls to see streaming videos and similar that can be found even in the most unlikely of places - such as the chat box in an online checkers or chess site. Also, more and more videogames use such sexualized images that can prime and influence people's concepts of what sexuality is... as well as body shapes and appearances. These dangers are as hazardous as the sharks.
Part 7

MIRAGE AT SEA: Simulation and games

This section covers the following topics:

• Understanding the simulation aspects of "games" and their impact
• Simulated violence, racism, and sexism within games
• More psychological traps for keeping a person in the sim/game

Here we turn a light on video games since they are monumental players (no pun intended) in the virtual world.

Virtual impact

Virtual worlds do have a real impact. Games provide simulated environments and experiences for users. Since every device user is different, it's often difficult to predict how someone will behave when gaming, simulations, and real life overlap.

My stance is that simulated games do affect people, especially those that contain overt violence. Now I'm not demonizing every game out there, but stating the fact that some games can create violent thoughts, ideas and behaviours in certain individuals. This is especially true if you have a coexisting mental health problem or other vulnerability in your everyday life that can easily morph a simulated scenario into a physical expression of violence.

Simulation games are vital in many fields and industries, including military and health care. It's interesting to note that researchers found that a large number of newly recruited soldiers would not fire at the enemy to kill him and, usually, approximately 1 out of every 20 soldiers would actually fire to kill. Why? Because many of them saw the enemy as a fellow human being. Simulation training in the military environment not only improves accuracy and skills, but also is effective in altering the attitudes of the trainee. In essence, the purpose of simulation in these situations is to literally dehumanize the enemy to allow the soldier to fire to kill. While this may save a soldier's life in combat, how do we transition such scenarios into our everyday environments in games?

In fact, studies have shown that the more interactive and the more senses that are involved in a simulation scenario, the more the user engages, and this increases the power such influences have on the participant or player.

So what happens when Billy plays a game that requires him to stab prostitutes and shoot police officers (the content of many actual popular on-line games)? Is he really improving hand-eye coordination, or is he learning that in the context of "entertainment" such behaviour is acceptable? Of course, not everybody who plays a first-person-shooter or a violent game suddenly has the urge to go out and steal a car, mug someone, stab someone, or engage in other types of violent
behaviours, but think about this: In the popular, readily available, vehicle theft game, often the goals of the game include objectives to steal cars, kill cops, and pay prostitutes for sex (and then kill the prostitutes so that you can get your money back).

**Stereotypes and Video Games**

With these points in mind, do you think it likely that virtual games have the impact to shape the way people think and behave toward one another in the real world? Research shows that this is a real (and potentially dangerous) possibility.

In a research test of Caucasian video game players, it was found that the participants playing violent games in which the characters were African American did, in fact, associate the characters with words like "terrible, horrible, and bad", which were displayed in the test. The results concluded that these Caucasian players were more likely than not to view African Americans in a negative manner.²

Other large widespread, comprehensive studies - designed to reveal the effects of video game violence on participants - concluded that racial and gender stereotypes run rampant in many of the most popular games. With regard to race and gender, players of both sexes, of all races, ages and geographic locations showed such behaviour. The focus of some studies included sampling video game content for stereotypical gender and race character portrayals. Other studies included exploration of the psychological impact - loosely defined as mental shorthand, which conveys images and ideas clearly and quickly - especially when referring to the widely accepted perception of one group of another.

Games can be entertainment tools, generally played to challenge and increase skills, enjoy interaction with friends and family and encourage creative thinking. Is it considered fun if games teach young (or older) minds to judge and dislike others with whom they have contact daily? Is this appropriate?

The games we play are not just games, but simulations with the same properties as described above. However, unlike a controlled simulation, where an individual has the benefit of a briefing before and debriefing after the event, most video game players just play the games, exposed to a variety of activities that are not accepted in most societies. In many cases, these games objectify women as well as encourage violence and racism towards others.

What do you think? If the game is sold with few restrictions/warnings and people play it for fun and entertainment, what kind of message does the user get? If we believe the literature and research on media and how such simulation games influence attitudes, why wouldn't video game simulations also affect the typical user?

The answer is not to blame videogames as the sole cause of all problem behaviours: but nor can we rule it out as a factor that may influence players. For some individuals, violent videogames can negatively influence behaviour.
As responsible society members, we naturally wish to guide ourselves and our loved ones to be aware of inappropriate exposure to unhealthy messages and behaviours. It's not just up to parents however; it's a problem of society, gaming industries, and government regulations, as well as cultural ethics and morals.

**Statistically thinking**

Interestingly, Douglas Gentile, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University, engaged in a study that determined that more than 8% of the gamers in his study group (between 8 and 18 years of age) displayed "pathological behaviour".

I want to assure you that just because you do something or play something "a lot" doesn't mean you're either pathological or addicted. The terms "pathological" or "addiction" in this sense are meant to imply extreme behaviours that damage normal mental, emotional, and physical function.

So how do you know if you or a loved one is a little too fond of video gaming and might need some help?

We covered "addiction" in a previous section. Keep that material in mind as you continue reading and ask yourself if any of these apply to you:

- You feel frustrated, impatient, and even angry when you're not online or engaged in video game play.
- You think about your online gaming or video game "playtime" when you're supposed to be doing other things like going to school, working, or even spending time with your family.
- You spend much more time with a videogame controller, keypad or smartphone than you do with your friends (offline, of course!).
- Others ask you what you do all the time, and you either shrug it off or lie about it because you're self-conscious or embarrassed about it.
- You have repetitive strain injury as a result of overusing your console.
- You get up in the middle of the night because you can't sleep and start checking out Facebook, e-mail, or any other venues to see what everyone is up to.

Of course, there's more, but this is a start. Now let's talk about the type of games people play, whether played directly on a computer, online through game consoles, or a smartphone.

MMORPGs (massive multiplayer online role-playing games) such as World of Warcraft™ (in the "old days", you might recall the hoop-la over *Dungeons & Dragons™*).

Certain first person shooter games like Halo™ and the Call of Duty™ series have even gained "addictive" status due to design and engagement with their scenarios (e.g. Halo addiction). Some players have bragged on online venues and blogs that they played these types of games for up to 19 hours non-stop.
Here "addictive" status terminology is considered a badge of honour to show a game is really great in the gamer communities.

Some games have an ending, while others don't really have an ending, which can make such scenarios even more "addictive." Everquest™ is a never-ending game where no one actually wins, and goals are wide and varied. The goal of such games is to increase levels, and people play hundreds of hours to reach the highest level. When they reach a certain point level, the game then changes, and on it goes. Such games offer users multiple characters, different "careers or roles", as well as weaponry as the game advances.

Games like Tetris™, Solitaire, and hidden object games, which may seem gentle and harmless, can still provide the same draw to some that the more violent role-playing games do for others. The level system that can go on and on with combined intermittent reinforcement can serve to ensnare the unwary. It all depends who you are and what might be the right "fix" for a situation.

You may recall several recent incidents in the news regarding the deaths of young people engaged in long-term role-playing games due to lack of self-care and becoming immersed in the virtual world. Below are a few true examples:

- 20-year old Brit died after playing 12-hour long Halo™ sessions without breaks.
- A 33-year-old South Korean dies after playing 27 continuous days that amounted to 650 hours of game play.
- A 28-year old wife and mother died of water intoxication after she guzzled down two gallons of water and then refused to urinate in order to win a "Hold Your Wee for a Wii" contest and Nintendo Wii™ system.
- A South Korean became so 'attached' to Starcraft™ that he lost his job, his girlfriend and became sleep-deprived and malnourished, which culminated in a 50-hour 'binge' of gaming. He died of dehydration and exhaustion that led to heart failure.

It's believed that pulmonary embolisms due to lack of physical movement and decreased blood circulation due to inactivity was the possible cause of these deaths. Other causes included malnutrition and heart failure.

How many games do you have on your computer right now that you play to break up a monotonous work day, a study session, or to kill some time before or after dinner? There are many free, standard games that come loaded on most computer systems, smartphones, tablets and so on, at purchase. There are tons of "free" game apps as well. Games do not need to be violent to hook people - although I suppose popular games like Angry Birds™ and Minecraft™ do have elements of that too. The key is where the gaming industry builds in the classic intermittent reinforcement and other classic psychological hooks that try to ensnare a user into the game - similar to the same techniques used for building
gambling venues.

What are your favourite games to play? How many hours a day or a week do you estimate you play these games, even solitaire-based games you play just because you "have to win" before you quit?

Should we even mention games available for download? The list of games on one site that is labelled suitable for young children include activities such as breaking out of prison, killing terrorists stealing vehicles, as well as sniping and assassination.

As mentioned elsewhere, many mental health experts and professionals cringe at the use of the word "addiction" in a clinical sense when it comes to Internet and video gaming addictions. However, that research is showing those who have problematic gaming behaviours have biological markers and changes similar to those with problem gambling. This does not prove gaming causes the brain changes - but that there is something here worth investigating.

The myth that blowing things up is good for you

There have been various articles in the popular news touting how video gaming can teach cognitive and coordination skills. These articles cite many games featuring violent narratives. Along with the cognitive and coordination skills people can develop from videogames, value messages can be transmitted as well. As I mentioned earlier, the more impactful and interactive a form of media is, the more it can influence behaviours and values.

Do we really need to teach people cognition and coordination coupled with virtual murder and mayhem? No - but people can get addicted to intensity as well and crave more and more thrills to get the "feel" of an original game. Our society needs to embrace values that can use gaming for pro-social values.

The concept that "blowing off steam" by playing a violent videogame by sublimating rage and anger is healthy - well, that too is also a myth. Rather than developing ways to manage and regulate one's emotional state, turning to using a game that allows one to enter a simulation can actually help form patterns of using violence in the real world. As mentioned, along with acquisition of cognition and coordination skills, learning a coping strategy of engaging in (simulated) violence can also be acquired as a transferable behaviour in the physical world.

Physical Consequences of Gaming "Addictions"

Have you ever been so focused on a game scenario, level or goal that you played longer than you know you should have? Have you sat there for an hour, or perhaps all day, doing your best to get to that next level, to achieve that pot of gold, or even to just win something? Whether you're battling dragons, witches, or supervillains, video games have the capacity and capability of taking us into a different realm, era, and situation.

For some, the allure of video games is much like the allure of reading. A videogame can transport you out of your office/bedroom/basement/dorm room
into a thrilling, exciting, and sometimes dangerous environment, all without having to leave your chair.

However, overuse of gaming devices and even computers can cause a number of physical consequences including:

- backache
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- sleep disturbances
- migraines
- eating behaviours
- poor hygiene

Have YOU ever skipped brushing your teeth, washing your face, or even taking a shower because you just have to finish a level before you go to bed/work/school?

**Video Game Ratings**

Did you know that games are rated just like movies? For example, a game that is rated "E" for everyone, is considered suitable for those who are six to 80 years old. Mild violence is often found in such games, as is mild foul language. Such games most commonly contain fantasy or cartoon environments.

Games rated with the "T" for teens are deemed appropriate for those 13 and above. These games often contain suggestive themes, crude or bathroom humour, some violence, some blood, and strong language as well as simulated gambling scenarios.

Then there is the rating "M" for mature. These games are deemed suitable for those who are 17 years old and older. These games may contain moderate to intense violence, gore, blood, strong language, and sexual content. Some of the most popular games sold today are rated "M".

Now let's move on "AO" or adults only, which are designed for those who are 18 years old or older. Games in this category include "prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity". Do you look at these ratings when you buy games for your kids? You should.

This is not to say that video games cannot be enjoyed. As with anything, moderation is the key (within reason). Gaming addictions/over-usage/attachments are all serious, and may have a definite effect on young minds as they grow. However, that moderation should not extend to turning a blind eye to games that promote misogyny, racism, and other abhorrent messages.

For parents, what can you do if you suspect that your child or teen is growing a little too fond of gaming? Engage them. We're not talking about keeping them busy with increased responsibilities or chores, which is more like a punishment. Help them find a creative outlet for their imagination and talents. Seek
opportunities that will get your child or teenager out of the house or away from media connectivity, if just for a little while.

Can you guess the average age of those who buy videogames? No, it's not 16 - it's 35! I have often seen parents buying games "for their kids" that were actually for the parents - and thus rationalize exposing their children to content that may be inappropriate for their ages. Many a parent has told me the hardships of feeling bored dealing with children's activities and wanting to secretly add in something for themselves. Well, who said parenting was easy? Not me!

Promote activities that engage (physical, not virtual) social interaction, promote personal talents or skills, and provide a sense of enjoyment and accomplishment for your child or teen. Easier said than done. I mean, we all know this - the question is: Why do we often not do so?

You need time and energy to set boundaries regarding Internet or gaming usage: and then you need to explain why you're concerned about their usage, or why such rules are being put in place. Try to find balance and compromise whenever possible, because a willing child or teen is much more apt to follow the rules than one who feels he or she has no input into their own behaviours. This balance is more dynamic than static - and requires emotional strength!

We'll talk more later about the possibility or need for professional help (and where you can get it) if you feel someone is already at the point where his or her attachment to the Internet or video gaming has crossed the line and you can't deal with these issues on your own.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

• Take some quiet time with no computer, television or other devices for 30 minutes a day. Try to spend at least a half hour or more on a new activity that requires no technological connections (e.g. walking, swimming, writing by hand).

• Make a list of as many "unplugged" activities to do yourself or with your family. Be as creative as possible, and think of fun, challenging or educational things to engage in and then schedule definite dates to do them. Include your children in the idea generation and planning.

• Count up the monetary cost of devices and equipment, games, upkeep, etc. Total the best estimate for the entire household for one month. (Hopefully you might have done this already from a previous reflective exercise I suggested earlier in the book!) Compare the possible shifting of spending per month from the regular cyber activities to some of the "unplugged" activities. Perhaps you might save some money!
KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

In today’s virtual world, games can not only be entertaining, but also a danger to physical and mental health. Monitor your family members’ games and changes in behaviour, as well as your own.

Simulation can develop real behavioural changes that transfer into the real world outside the gaming environment.

Excessive and unhealthy gaming is a problem of society in terms of cultural ethics and morals. Responsibility falls on parents, teachers, gaming industries, and government regulations to monitor and regulate its usage.
Interlude: Swimming Techniques I

Swimming speed and endurance are limited more by poor technique than by physical fitness. Similarly, effective "strokes" in cyber swimming are important. Below are a few metaphorical concepts for reflection.

Cyber Breast Stroke

This is a pattern of pushing your arms down into the water to have your head pop up and then follow up with a whip kick.

POOR TECHNIQUE: This style is characterized as the repeated bobbing in and out of cyberspace and into physical world. The pattern is not fixed or planned but reactionary and one of the multitasking concepts we will explore. In addition to the social implications and impact on being present in the moment and with others, this pattern can lead to people walking into poles, into traffic, or car accidents. This is why more and more laws are forbidding texting while driving a vehicle!

HEALTHY TECHNIQUE: A pattern of planned and rhythmic interaction with cyberspace. For example, 1.5 hours of work on a computer followed by 15-20 minutes of a walk break.

Cyber Front Crawl

POOR TECHNIQUE: Barrelling ahead through cyber activities without a limit, not knowing when to take a scheduled break - crashing into viruses like bumping the head against the pool edge when doing a lap.

HEALTHY TECHNIQUE: Symmetrical rhythmic pattern of balancing activities to create on-going breaks while keeping goals and limits in sight!

Swimmers try to develop a symmetrical stroke with bilateral breathing (i.e. breathing on both left and right sides with their mouths above the waterline on alternating strokes) to balance their directions. The metaphor here is once you sight a goal, you do not need to keep stopping to sight it over and over if you can master some dynamic balance of keeping things in your life going on a consistent basis. Not a one-time quick fix but an on-going pattern you want to live with in terms of interacting with cyberspace.

In fact, great swimmers incorporate the ability to "sight" their direction in the pattern of their symmetrical techniques. So too can people reaffirm their long term personal goals and objectives and match these with their daily activities.
Part 8

GATHERING SHELLS: Cyber Shopping

This section covers the following topics:

- It isn't about the money - it is about the spending
- Driving forces of shopping behaviours
- Problematic shopping

Is it the spending?

Shopping online has become increasingly popular worldwide for a number of reasons. The Internet offers the convenience of shopping without leaving home, the ability to comparison shop for the best merchandise at the best prices, as well as being able to shop 24 hours a day. With a click, you can buy something from China, Africa, or Australia and have it shipped right to your front door, without the hassle and time consumption of shopping in brick and mortar stores.

However, excessive use of the Internet when it comes to our shopping habits can lead to a number of concerns. Let's talk about the connection between shopping and gambling; you'll likely frown in confusion. Since when does online shopping have anything to do with gambling? I ask you this - have you ever engaged in an auction purchase on eBay?

You might say that eBay isn't about gambling; it's a shopping and auction site. But consider this: Let's say you found the perfect wallet by a famous designer. Suggested retail price? $1,000. Sure, you've always wanted one but they're way too expensive and you've never bought one.

However, on eBay, you see an auction for a classic designer wallet that has two hours left to go on the clock. The current high bid is $25, and you do have a few extra bucks in your checking account after paying your bills this month. You plunk down a bid for $50 and receive a message that says your bid must be $51 or more.

The previous bidder's maximum bid must have been at least $50, or even higher, perhaps as high as $100, so you plunk down a bid for $75. You're disappointed that, once again, you have not reached beyond the previous bidder's maximum bid, and you are informed that you must now bid $101 or more. Okay, now you're determined to 'out-bid' the previous bidder, so you bid $125. Congratulations, you are now the highest bidder!

You go about your business, and then nearly two hours later, you receive an alert that you have been outbid! You check the site and find that there are only 7 minutes left in auction. You log back in and see that the current bid on that designer wallet is now up to $275.

Still, that's a lot better than the $1,000 retail price, so you place a bid for $300,
only to be informed that, once again, you haven't exceeded the maximum bid of the previous bidder. Now you have a choice to make. Clock is ticking... so, you bid $325 with under a minute left on the clock. As the seconds wind down, you keep refreshing the page, holding your breath in anticipation. Finally, the clock runs out, and hurrah! - You're the winner!

You feel great! You won! Bwa-haha, you successfully outbid someone else, and it feels good. You got a designer wallet for $325 (although you normally wouldn't spend near that much on a wallet) but hey, it's a designer wallet.

Even better, eBay and similar auction sites make it easy for bidders to pay for their purchases through PayPal or other online payment services. You don't have to do anything, just click a button, and boom; the money has been transferred from your bank account to the seller. How easy was that?

You anxiously await your designer wallet in the mail, and it arrives less than a week later. Unfortunately, after showing it off to friends, you're informed that it's a knockoff.

In the end, was it all worth it?

For many online shoppers, especially when it comes to auction sites like eBay and Amazon it's not so much the actual product that matters anymore, but the challenge of bidding against someone else, knowing just the right moment when to refresh the page, insert a new bid, and reap the glory of winning.

Buying online is easier than ever, and because we don't have to physically go to a store, write out a check, or whip out our credit card, it somehow seems less painful to click a button that says "Buy Now". Everything is done for us. It's easy to distance our mind from the actual amount of money you have just spent, because you're not even touching "real money".

**The thrill of the win**

Unfortunately, many consumers end up watching and bidding on items that they don't really need. The thrill of the purchase is enough. If you've ever watched the television show *Hoarders*, you'll know what I mean by that statement. For some, shopping is not just an action; it's a reaction to a number of psychological issues including loneliness, isolation, depression, and low self-esteem.

Online auction sites and online shopping scenarios cater to individuals who shop and spend beyond their means.

Shopping isn't an issue for most of us, but for some of us it can be problematic. Chances are that you have, at least once, won an auction on the Internet, shopped online or spent hours comparison-shopping, browsing, and looking for just the right item to purchase for yourself, a friend, or a loved one. There's nothing wrong with that.

So, what compels you to shop online?

- Convenience?
- Not enough time to go shopping in a physical store?
• Just don't like dealing with real time shopping environments?
• You want to save gas money?
• Don't want to deal with the hassle of having to get out of your car, drive to a store, and purchase something?

Take a look at your smartphone, computer or other connectivity device right now. Do you have an app for eBay™, iTunes™, Amazon™, or another online auction or shopping site? If you do, how often do you use it?

Many of us scoff and think that there's absolutely nothing wrong with taking advantage of modern technology when it comes to certain shopping behaviours, and, for the most part, this is correct.

However, consider situations where individuals become more than enamoured with such conveniences and accessibility.

For instance, a stay at home husband shops online daily for what he sees as small purchases. Unfortunately, he and his partner discover at the end of the month that they don't have enough money to pay bills, purchase groceries or other necessities. Think about how the husband feels and, most likely, the stress and strain the situation has put on the couple. Imagine this same family, only it's the wife who is online (maybe during breaks at work or at night) browsing the auction site for items she wants for herself, or maybe even her partner. Again, when done in excess, online shopping can lead to financial and other problems.

Again, it's important for everyone to recognize the signs of overindulgence, in addition to compulsive, uncontrolable, or impulsive behaviours when it comes to our cyber connections, shopping choices and behaviours. Remember that an overindulgence of anything, including shopping behaviours, can cause harm not only to you, but also to others around you. It goes way beyond having a drained bank account.

Ask yourself these questions when it comes to your own online shopping behaviours:

Why are you spending? Is it because of the escape/pleasure, or another emotion that spending money provides you? Do you like the sensation of control or even power that you feel when you spend money, dip into that credit card line, or click the "Buy it Now" button online?

Looking or searching for certain items gives many of us the opportunity to engage in comparison shopping. We feel like we're performing due diligence by researching - looking for the best deal and bargains. However, we sometimes take this to extremes, to the point where finding the lowest price becomes an obsession.

Does bidding on and winning an item mean more to you than the item itself? Do you buy items online that you never end up using or wearing? Many of us feel that we have to snap up that deal or take advantage of that bargain before it's gone. We can always 'use the item later'. This attitude solicits a whole myriad of behaviours that could take up an entire book. Again, think Hoarders television
show, which showcases some individuals who are actually compelled to purchase products because they're on sale, whether they need them or not.

Is the actual possession or purchasing/winning of an item more about control or power than the item itself? This is similar to the bidding mentioned above, and is often associated with impulsive decisions and personalities.

Is it the item itself that actually is important to you? Do you really need or want it? Many of us are collectors, but do we really need the same hat/shirt/dress/shoes in five different colours?

I ask these questions of you in order to encourage you to self-reflect on your own online shopping habits and behaviours. Again, not everyone overindulges in shopping environments online; often it is because of its convenience and ease. Yet some find it too easy to buy something for the thrill of the purchase, the auction win, or the thrill of the chase, and then end up with an item that got shoved in a drawer, is in the garage collecting dust, or never even taken out of the box at all.

So, ask yourself this very important question: What does the term "shopaholic" mean to you? Remember the power of stereotypes and labels. I think the term "shopaholic" diverts us from again remembering people are complex and have many reasons to engage in problematic behaviours.

**Some possible motivations**

It is important to reflect on overuse of cyber connections when it comes to spending and shopping. Although there can be many reasons, here are just two often cited underlying issues often identified as connected to overspending scenarios:

1. Loneliness - Lonely people may venture out to shopping malls merely for a sense of belonging within a social environment. They want to mingle with other people, whether to actually socialize with them or not. Even a brief interaction with the person who takes our money over the counter is enough to assuage feelings of loneliness for those who are extremely solitary or isolated.

In terms of online activities, often a person might research online the items they will buy in person, or look at malls to frequent, and similar activities. It can also act as a way to feel less lonely, immersed in virtual shopping malls. Many sites now how an active "chat box customer service" component that allows visitors to text-chat with someone from the retail store in real time.

Problematic shopping behaviours are often associated with behaviours similar to gambling behaviours. For example, when bidding and buying on eBay, the actions performed are extremely similar to betting or gambling. Playing against others, even unseen bidders, is yet another way to feel "connected" and not feel lonely. There is some concept of being part of a community - although the goal is to win the auction item. Similar to going to a gambling casino or a bar to drink alcohol, where "everyone knows your name." Although online, you might only be known as random7823@nowherevilleDOTcom. Which is still better than being
totally alone, isn't it? Or maybe there are better ways to try to connect with others if the issues that created the isolation are dealt with.

2. Depression - When people are depressed, they often engage in what appears from the outside to be self-destructive behaviours. Most of these actions from the inner point of view are considered ways of coping with some difficult situation. Perhaps isolation feelings as described above. Sometimes they don't deliberately set out to engage in such behaviour. Some individuals often bake, turn to comfort eating, shop online, gamble, or engage in more physical endeavours such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and even destructive behaviours such as self-cutting in order to feel some sense of relief from depression. Even a second or two of joy seems worth it. It is about keeping it together in the short run. Hence why auction sites and similar are quite potent draws to those with mood vulnerabilities.

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**REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

- If you are a member of an online auction site, think about how many times you have bid more on an item than you intended to pay. Did you continue until you outbid others? If you won, did you feel more excited about the item or the fact that you won?
- Reflect on your motives and emotions as it relates to shopping (on or off-line). Think about whether you have ever spent money shopping for the sole purpose of relieving, replacing or adding something going on in your life.
- Make a list of as many items you can that you have purchased over the past year that you either regret buying or rarely, if ever, used. Try to recall your state of mind when you purchased the items. If you can't remember, perhaps just check your bank, PayPal and other accounts: they will give you a true measure of how much you really did spend.

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**KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER**

Shopping online is a convenient, time and money saving way to purchase goods and services for millions of people around the world. However, like with any activity, if done to excess it can be the source of financial, emotional and family problems.

As with any problematic behaviour, there are underlying factors, which are unique to each individual, that drive the behaviours. It is essential to identify these factors in order to appropriately address and resolve the issues.

If you believe you may have an online shopping problem, never feel that you are alone. Although it would not be possible to guess how many of the over six billion
people on earth shop online, by some reports close to 30 percent of the world population shops online - up to well over 50 percent during holidays. With these figures it is not hard to imagine that not all of the consumers are driven by low prices and convenience.
Interlude: Swimming Techniques II

As mentioned, swimming speed and endurance are limited more by poor technique than by physical fitness. Similarly, effective "strokes" in cyber swimming are important. Below are a few metaphorical concepts for reflection.

**Cyber Backstroke**

POOR TECHNIQUE: Turning one's back on the entire cyberspace and just keeping near the periphery, not understanding what might be sneaking up behind or what might be coming ahead.

HEALTHY TECHNIQUE: Taking an extended minimalist technological time period, e.g. minimal checking of messages or watching videos as part of being able to go on a vacation, spending time being present for others and so on. At the same time, it includes keeping the tech next to you in case of urgent issues and managing a bit of work when needed because it helps to reduce your stress!

**Cyber Treading Water**

POOR TECHNIQUE: Panicking due to too many cyber and real world competing priorities to the extent that one begins to thrash around, risking losing energy, and sinking.

HEALTHY TECHNIQUE: Using the time to assess the issues in the cyber and the real world before proceeding to make some decision. This can flip into a "backstroke" tread to gain breath, focus, and minimize distractions.
Part 9

**CLIFF DIVING: Gambling and the cyber world**

This section covers the following topics:
- Driving forces of gambling behaviours
- Problematic gambling
- Cloaked and hidden gambling elements in cyberspace

So what does Internet *gambling* have to do with Internet *gaming*?

Well, it sometimes depends on the person's point of view... for example:

Person 1: "Do you gamble?"
Person 2: "Nope!"
Person 1: "Wait a second - what do you play all night on your laptop?"
Person 2: "All Star Poker Monstro Mania 8.3!"
Person 1: "I thought you said you don't gamble?"
Person 2: "I'm not gambling! I'm gaming! It's an Internet game!"
Person 1: "Oh... you spent $50 buying virtual chips, avatars, and upgrades, spent 5 hours a night each night all week, skipped your chores...and this isn't a problem?"
Person 2: "Well, it's not a gambling problem!"
Person 1: "It's a gaming problem?"
Person 2: "No, it's an Internet problem! You need to get me a faster connection - that is why I lose so much!"

Online gambling is a relatively modern social phenomenon. While gambling has been around for thousands of years, today it's easier than ever before, again, with a simple click on a tech device. Gambling attracts all ages and interests, whether betting on sports, playing a friendly game of poker, or playing solitary online games.

We will start here and then lead into how the psychological dynamics and processes used in gambling are being used within other games online - cloaked and unregulated due to it not appearing as 'traditional' casino gambling games.

**Internet gambling**

To some extent, gambling appeals to our innate nature as human beings. The majority of people subscribe to the concept that life itself is a gamble. Humans make decisions and hope that the decisions chosen are the right ones. Gamblers assume (or cross their fingers and pray) that they are making the right choice - and for that right choice, they receive a reward. So what difference does it make
whether someone gambles on the Internet, and why do people make such a big deal about it?

We'll get into that in just a minute. First, I want to ask you a question. Have you ever gambled on the Internet? Or, asked another way... have you ever played a gambling game on the Internet?

Maybe you are not sure what the answer is. Not everyone who gambles on the Internet is playing Texas Hold 'em, or placing bets on horse races (or any other kind of race or competition), or a sporting event - but many are. Gambling has become increasingly available as we move from physical locations to online venues.

Throughout Canada and the United States for example, slots, slot facilities, and other gaming venues are shutting down because alternative strategies offer greater and newer access to Internet-based gambling.

"Hidden gaming" scenarios that offer virtual money encourage such behaviours and lead to crossover behaviours - for all age groups. Such an example is transitioning from an online video game scenario to an online gaming and gambling scenario, such as a casino. There are also many more hidden gambling scenarios in games for youth that appear to have nothing to do with traditional casino gambling games.

First let us look at "traditional" gambling behaviours in younger groups of individuals, including those in high school and middle grade school environments.

A recent study in Ontario, Canada, determined that approximately 450,000 students engaged in some form of gambling activity within the past year. That's 43% of students in one Canadian province alone! Males are more likely to engage in online gambling activities than females, and their draw and involvement in such activities increased with age and grade (Ontario Student Drug Health Use Survey (OSDUHS) studies. [32])

The most common types of gambling activities identified in the study:

- Cards - 20%
- Other gambling - 19%
- Lottery tickets - 16%
- Sports pools - 13%
- Bingo - 7%
- Dice - 6%
- Sports lotteries - 5%
- Video gambling machines/slots - 4%
- Any Internet gambling - 3%
- Internet poker - 3%
- Casino gambling - 1%
Interestingly, the same study took this youth gambling phenomenon a step further and determined that multi-gambling activity also existed, which defines participation in five or more of the ten gambling activities listed above (again excluding Internet poker). Approximately 32,000 of those students contained within the study in the Ontario province engaged in multi-gambling activities.

Of those students, money spent on gambling ranged from $50-$200 or more per activity. Many students stated that they had gambled more than they had planned to bet because of problems such as family arguments or problems at school or work. Some even skipped classes or didn't go to school or work at all because of their betting activities. Some of these kids either borrowed money or stole something in order to cover their gambling debts, and many experienced arguments or disagreements with friends or family because of the money that was spent on gambling.

What does all this mean?

This is just one province in Canada - you can imagine how prevalent this problem is, multiplied not only through all Canadian provinces, but the United States as well? To make matters worse, following the study, it was determined that approximately 29,000 students in one province alone were likely to have a gambling problem.

Gambling issues are believed to be more common among those who are "excessive" gamers, so students were also asked how often they played video games, as well as whether they had issues or problems with their gaming lifestyles. Twenty percent of those in the study said they played games daily, while 13% claimed four to five times a week.

After being questioned regarding their preoccupation with gaming and/or gambling, tolerance levels, personal attitudes and behaviours, including loss of control, withdrawal, a desire to escape, and an overall disregard for consequences, their answers were eye-openers. Approximately 10% of all students in the Ontario province alone (nearly 100,000 students) are likely to have video gaming problems.

**Alarming numbers are eye openers**

I won't drown you to a slow death with a bunch of numbers here, but just enough to give you an idea of what's going on in society today with regard to Internet gambling. Again, we're not just talking about 'traditional' gambling games, but any games that have the potential to require a person to 'bet' on a win or a prize.

Online gambling venues offer not only a great deal of convenience and privacy, but 24-hour accessibility. Since you're able to gamble in the comfort of your own home or environment, you don't have to worry about "the looks", social stigma, or judgments from others.

Would you feel more comfortable gambling, shopping or gaming online than in more social environments? You would not be alone if you answered yes to this question.
The odd thing is that the rates of individuals who develop gambling problems are three to four times higher for those who gamble online than those who don't. For example, the risk of developing a problem gambling situation for non-Internet gamblers is approximately 7.7%, as opposed to the 37.9% of those who increase their risk of gambling behaviours through online play.[33]

Some of the most common substance use problems associated with gambling include drug use, dependence on marijuana, and hazardous drinking. This is not to say that anyone who gambles has other co-dependency issues. I'm just saying that those who engage in such behaviours are nearly twice (and sometimes three or four times) as likely to develop additional issues with gambling.

Most types of abuse or overuse of anything, and that includes the Internet, is often associated with other issues including psychological distress, low self-esteem, and depression. It is common in clinical practice to find problem gamblers often deal with elevated levels of psychological distress, have low self-esteem, a high risk for depression, and many have thought of or attempted suicide.

Problems compounding problems
During the previously mentioned OSDUHS study, students in the Ontario school district were also asked about delinquent behaviours, which ranged from non-violent actions such as stealing, selling marijuana, "minimal arson," and taking a car without permission, with more violent acts including physical altercations, participating in gang or group fights, or carrying a weapon. The results of the study are alarming, as problem gamblers often find themselves dealing with some of those non-violent behaviours listed above, with over 50% having stolen $50 or less or vandalized property. Just over 47% of those problem gamblers had also engaged in more violent behaviour including assault and/or carrying a weapon.

A student with a gambling problem is more likely to report a substance abuse problem and is also more likely to report emotional, psychological distress and low self-esteem along with it. A student with a gambling problem is 18 times more likely to contemplate suicide, which is extremely alarming.

If nothing else, this study gives parents and today's youth something to think about. Is there an overlap between gambling and video gaming? Studies show that there is indeed. The severity of that overlap has yet to be determined.

Are there such things as Online Gambling Predictors?
Who is in danger of becoming addicted to Internet gambling? In Canada, nearly 70% of the population gambles, but just over 3% of those are directly affected by problem gambling.[34]

In most cases, gambling behaviours and addictions begin in the teenage years for males, while women tend to develop their habits later. However, when women are 'bitten by the gambling bug' they can exhibit more severe addictive behavioural symptoms than men. In most cases, gambling issues, online or off,
are heavily influenced by social stress, certain personality types, and abuse of alcohol or drugs of any kind. The most common signs and symptoms associated with problem gambling include but are not limited to:

- A preoccupation with gambling activities
- Focusing on ways to access money to finance gambling activities
- Requiring increasing amounts of money for gambling in order to achieve the same thrill or enjoyment
- Repeated, unsuccessful attempts to deal with betting behaviours
- Increased irritability when attempting to cut down on or stop gambling
- Using gambling as an escape from stress, anxiety, or depression
- Gambling to recoup losses
- Committing any type of crime to finance gambling activities
- Lying to friends, family members or peers to hide severity of gambling behaviours or problems
- Placing family or friendships or even employment at risk because of gambling behaviours
- Heavily borrowing money from others to resolve gambling debts

What is the definition of problem gambling? A person who develops problem gambling is diagnosed with typically more than one of the above symptoms, but not more than five. More than five symptoms often lead to a possible clinical diagnosis of a having clinical gambling addiction.

Many people gamble at one time or another in some way. Perhaps a planned trip to the local casino for a bit of fun, or playing games online just for something different or to entertain ourselves. Most of us don't have to worry about a gambling problem, but the condition can be quite insidious for those unaware of how easily it is to become trapped in a vicious cycle.

It's difficult for someone who does not have an irresistible or irrepressible urge to gamble to understand what draws individuals to feel that compulsion. However, the same goes for any type of compulsion or behaviour.

**Example: When Gambling, Gaming, Simulation and Apps Meet!**

Here I am going to share with you my own personal experiences regarding exploring a game on my smartphone. I visited an app store and checked out various Poker game applications. I downloaded one that was highly rated from amongst many listed. Many of these "gaming" apps are free and link into your social network sites, allowing your "friends" to see what you are playing and perhaps join in. Let me share with you my reflections after playing this particular poker game for a few weeks.

What troubled me the most is that these apps are excellent primers for a number of behavioural "addictions" because their creators have done a fantastic job in replicating the fun, as well as the hazards, of the games - at least in terms of
psychological techniques to reinforce continuous play.

For example, many of these "gaming" apps don't have any age restriction warnings before you download, which typically appears anytime you download anything else, including Web browser apps. Why? Because it's "only a game with no real money," so yes, children can be primed to go on to the real thing. Let's take a look a little more closely at some of the sensory results, including sights and sounds, which players may experience when playing these games.

Women are often sexualized in these games. In fact, one of the most popular games has a cartoon Jessica Rabbit-style woman holding up cards for the splash page (main landing page on a website). When you sit down at a virtual table, another woman appears, telling you to wait until the next turn. Just like women portrayed in game shows or semi-naked in chorus lines in Vegas casinos, such objectification of women or using women to "dress up" a game are naturally imprinted on the mind of some younger individuals.

Anonymity is a valuable commodity for many virtual "gamers." You're able to choose your own name and no one knows who you really are. You can play and not feel the embarrassment, concern, or anxiety that you may experience playing a competitive game in the physical world with others.

Let's talk about the virtual chips. The goal of the game is to accumulate chips/money. However, the amount of time someone spends playing is often the real price paid. For example, you get to see and access special "locked" chips if you provide your real ID, and in some games, you can even buy those chips, although you don't ever win any real money. Who would pay one dollar real money for $1,000 in virtual or pretend chips? You'd be amazed. Many do - as they still have value to the player...who is the #1 point holder and such.

Now let's talk about bragging rights. Many games offer ranks, and the higher your score, the higher you rank. In poker games, you'll be given a title such as "Playa" or "Poker Pro" as you reach incremental levels. As long as you keep playing, you'll keep advancing in levels and points. Even when you lose a hand, you'll maintain your points. There is a psychological appeal to how you rank in games as many who work with the younger population have noticed... the longer you keep spending time on a game, the more you advance.

Speaking of time, most of these apps seem to make the clock vanish on the phone or tablet. You need to leave the app to find the time, and this not an oversight. It is also a practice to remove clocks/indicators of time in physical casino environments.

In addition, the sound effects and other sensory associated Pavlovian conditioning built into the game create intermittent reinforcement to help people get more into the gaming behaviours. There are many exciting sound effects in these games. The ka-ching! of the chips - a winning sound; an "oooooaaaaa" of amazement when you go "all in"; a beeping sound to remind you to decide if you are raising, calling or folding if you don't decide quickly (yes, the game does encourage quick decisions - shorter than any real poker game rules). All of these
make wonderful psychological motivators and reinforcers.

For many, virtual games like poker, played with others in a social environment community, give the player a sense of belonging and camaraderie. You're actually playing with another person, not a computer robot. For many, this provides a social environment that is just as important and real to the player as a "real time" social network. You can chat about the game, or anything else you want while you're playing. The problem is that you never know exactly who you are playing with (or whether the game is played against an inanimate computer program).

The communication is made via the comment box (or chat box) on the website. Because of this anonymity, some players feel the freedom to post derogatory, racial, or negative comments because they don't have to worry about being identified.

I've seen numerous racial, sexual and threatening comments posted in such comment boxes quite regularly. No one monitors these comments and the editing powers within apps are extremely limited. While some players claim that they talk tough to throw off other players in the game to win a hand, what does this say about a person's developing rapport with their fellow humans? Again, no one knows who they're playing against. They could be a kid, a teenager, an adult, or an older man or woman. How do you know?

Other classic factors designed to reinforce playing include that every day you log in you get a random number of bonus chips to play with! Keep coming back for more! Now that you are here...care to sit down and play?

Also, beware the PUSH notifications. For those of you who are unfamiliar with that term, it is where the app can display messages on your device for important news, information or whenever the game app developers want to make an announcement. You might hear a PING and look at your smartphone and see a text message "DON'T FORGET TO COLLECT YOUR BONUS CHIPS TODAY!"

My advice - shut the notification off. However, many apps state outright if you leave the PUSH on, you get even more extra bonus chips.

Plus of course, most free apps carry many advertisements. However, for a few dollars more, you can play the game "advert free." Yes - free for a price!

I could go on but I hope you have seen the image I've sketched of the potential power of these apps. Although not playing for money - it can still consume real money, time, and effort as well as open the door for potential cyber bullying.

Now, you might say, "Dr. Ballon downloaded it and he was OKAY - so what's the big deal?" Well, just because I, in my current health context and state of mind, had enough protective factors to resist developing problematic use of the games, doesn't mean everyone can. It also doesn't mean that the next time I play and perhaps happen to be in a different health circumstance or state of mind, I won't develop a problem. If one can lead a healthy life and play these games then it really isn't a concern. However, there are vulnerable people who can and will develop difficulties due to various circumstances and persuasive features of the
games. Sometimes, developing a pattern over time can be subtle and grow into a genuine addiction.

In summary, thanks to our technology, people can now walk around with app games that have different levels of simulation and many are much more sophisticated than playing a simple card game. It is now possible to have a virtual casino experience in your hands.

Look at your phone right now. What kind of apps do you have? Would you be able to explain to me exactly what they are and how they explicitly and implicitly affect you?

**Where did all the youth gamblers go?**

The OSDUHS findings demonstrate that youth seem to *gamble* less but are *gaming* more. This does not mean that they are not gambling. It’s all how you look and name the behaviours. The app I described above - strip off the poker façade but distil its essence and use in other forms. Thus, while not truly gambling with money, users are still exposed to gambling, and associated behaviours, via a game.

For example, imagine playing an online game where you can get a mystic power by obtaining a magical stone that grants random abilities. Well, you need to spend points in the game to get those stones. Those points you can buy with real money. I have had a few individuals in my practice spend thousands of dollars over a weekend buying $7 stones, hoping to get the special 1/1000 chance ultimate power in the game. Instead, they receive random lesser powers - so they never feel they lost anything, but they just didn't get what they wanted. Yet they feel the same pull gamblers do, with the same cognitive errors (play 1000 times and win the 1/1000 chance prize - no, it doesn't happen that way).

What is the game replicating in casino terms? A slot machine! Except, since it’s now dressed up in a role-playing game, with points instead of money, paying out in powers instead of cash, it goes totally unnoticed and unregulated by systems supposed to protect the young and old from gambling... let me delve more.

A slot machine is designed to pay usually 85 cents on the dollar; which means for every dollar put in, the player is usually allowed to win back 85 cents. If someone always lost - well, they wouldn't want to play. The game creates a false sense of winning to reinforce playing behaviours-put $5 in a slot machine and BING BING BING you won $3! Winner! $3! When, in fact, that means you lost $2. Look back at the role-playing game dynamics above and you have the same thing.

Just like many apps appear free, they have "in-app" purchases, where if you get tired of a game and just want to win, you can pay real cash to rise to the next level. Also, there are often games of chance within these games to allow some winning of points - but often, if you want to win all the achievements, some games are designed so that you MUST buy something in the game to win.

Sometimes it is just a cute little cyber animal asking to be fed - but when it runs
out of food, you can play a random game to get points or for some money to buy more food... gotcha!

So, when a game has intermittent reinforcements, hidden wins/losses, behavioural cues, random chance, and in-app purchases are the only ways to really "win" you are likely dealing with a cloaked gambling game.

The dangers of this are that there are no warnings; they can prime youth and/or adults into real on-going gambling behaviours. They can also have drastic financial and social effects. Gambling didn't go away - it has been adapted for 21st century technology and the designers are raking in billions until we get around to calling foul.

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REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

• Make a list of any "real world" gambling activities in which you participate. Include lotteries, auctions, casinos, bingo, etc.
• Make a list of all of the gaming and/or gambling in which you participate. Include apps and Internet websites.
• Review all the games and simulations you play. Are there any elements of "gambling" within that you may now recognize?
• Ask yourself: How much time do I spend gambling each week? How much money do I spend? What other impacts might there be?

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KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

The essence of gambling is placing a bet on a random outcome. We often try to fool ourselves that we can control the outcome. The gambling industry often likes to help us believe that as well, and there are many psychological principles employed to reinforce this. It is easy to fool oneself, especially with all that help from the designers to make the player feel smarter, better, even richer...even if it is in virtual chips only.

Developers of gaming (and gambling) Internet sites are trained to pull out all the stops to engage users, including stimulation of senses through imagery as well as sounds. The more stimulated the player, the more he/she will play...which translates to "Jackpot!" for the developers of the website.

Money is not the only cost of excessive online gaming or gambling. "Real" time lost with family, friends, even jobs or other responsibilities is a much higher price in the long run.

Lastly, gambling elements are embedded in many games and apps across the
cyber world. But as they appear not to be a casino game, with no direct money
going in and out of the activities (although indeed thousands of real dollars can
flow through them as we speak via buying points, selling game characters on
EBay™ for real cash etc.), they lurk in the shadows for the vulnerable.
**Interlude: Chlorine & Other Disinfectants**

Well, as mentioned, you are usually swimming more in an ocean, but taking time to get protection from typical "cyber infections" is important. For instance, make sure your antiviruses, firewalls, net-nannies, and pop-up blockers are up to date and working. Even with that, you must still keep a reflective eye on pop-ups offering anti-viral free software for downloads that actually are Trojan viruses!
Part 10

**NAUTICAL STREAMS: Sex & Pornography**

This section covers the following topics:

- The pervasiveness of sexual content in cyberspace
- Driving forces of online sex behaviours
- Problematic online sexual behaviours

An urban legend claims the Net is 80% porn. I have no idea if this is true and cannot find a source - but indeed it would be foolish to ignore the fact that sexual elements, erotica, and pornography is interwoven throughout the virtual worlds. From texting to streaming videos to little chat boxes, it seems ubiquitous. Some people argue, "Well, it's the 21st century culture". Yet that doesn't mean it is healthy. What are people interpreting regarding healthy sexuality? Some studies indicate teenage boys no longer want to date girls their age as they do not appear like the images seen in games or videos!

**By the numbers**

Even out-dated statistics are alarming. In 2006, over 28,000 users of the Internet viewed pornography every second, and approximately every 40 minutes, a new pornography video or download was created in the U.S. alone. Billions of dollars are made from porn websites and creators over the Internet, second only to "old-fashioned" videos/DVDs that are soon to join the 8-track tapes in the bins of oblivion. Internet porn ranks more prevalent than magazines, novelties, cable or pay-for-view, and exotic dance/stripper clubs.

Common search terms used by adults for Internet access include keywords like porn, teen sex, free sex, group sex, sex chat, cybersex, teen porn, and a myriad of others. Over 414 million pages on the Internet can be accessed with such keywords. Between 2001 and 2008, average monthly visitors to adult websites increased by 75 million individuals.

Some studies claim average age of an Internet user's first exposure to pornography is 11 years old, while the most consumers of Internet porn are between 35 and 50 years of age. Still, nearly 80% of 15 to 17-year-olds have had a number of "hard-core" exposures, and 90% of 8 to 16-year-olds admitted they have viewed porn online and even while doing homework!

The availability of sex and porn on the Internet is staggering, with many men admitting to accessing such porn at work. Adult Internet pornography statistics are also eye-opening, even with regard to the breakdown between men and women accessing adult sexual content.

Some data has been gathered from a number of sources that include the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the Crimes Against Children...
Resource Center, Child Exploitation and Protection Online, the FBI, and the National Crime Prevention Center, to determine a number of statistics, such as:

- Teenage girls are more likely than their male counterparts to post personal videos or photos online.
- Nearly 25% of teenage girls admitted they have posted semi-nude or even nude videos/photos of themselves online.
- 70% of children between 7 and 18 years old have inadvertently accessed or encountered online pornography, most often while searching the web for homework situations.
- A broad age group of girls (nearly 86%) engage in online chatting environment/situations without their parents' knowledge. Nearly 54% of those girls believe they could engage in a cyber-relationship without anyone being the wiser.
- Approximately 20% of all teenage Internet users have been targeted by unrequested and unwanted solicitation of sexual activities. This can include but is not limited to requests for information, to chat, or to engage in sexual activity.
- Chat rooms, again according to the FBI, offer instant communication to anyone around the world and are one of the main avenues for paedophiles or sexual predators to find victims on the Internet.

**Texting/Computer Lingo Cheat Sheet**
(Seen in text messages, IM, chat or in emails, etc.)

If you do happen to glance over your child or teenager's shoulder while they're on the computer to see what they're up to, you may notice a number of "aqua mittens" or abbreviations. If you see the acronym POS, your child is warning the person on the other end about a "parent over shoulder". Do you know what P911 means? It means 'parents alert'.

- 411 - More information
- 420 - Let's get high
- 4AO - For adults only
- 6Y - Sexy
- A3 - Anytime, anywhere, anyplace
- AITR - Adult in the room
- ASL - (or variation of) Age/sex/location
- B9 - Boss is watching
- B/F - Boyfriend
- BCOY - Big crush on you
- BTYCL - Bootycall
- CD9 - Code 9, meaning 'Parents around'
D46 - Down for sex
DM - Do me
F2F - Face to face
FBFR - Facebook friend
FWB - Friend with benefits
KPC - Keeping parents clueless
LGH - Let's get high
MBS - Mom behind shoulder (also MOS - Mother over shoulder)
NFOC - Naked in front of the computer
NSA - No strings attached
PAW - Parents are watching
PIR - Parents in Room
PRON - Meaning pornography
SR2 - Send to receive (you send me a picture, I'll send you mine)
TDTM - Talk dirty to me (or TD2M)
WTGP - Want to go private or talking out of the public chat area

As I’m sure you know, this list is most likely out of date at the time of this writing and thousands more have added by the time you read these pages. However, I provide this list as a source of information and a reminder to be on the lookout for learning new codes!

**Sadly, now commonplace: Sexting**

Sexting is an activity engaged in by multiple age groups, but mainly teens.

I already mentioned the large number of teens, and especially females, who have posted semi-nude or nude videos or photos on cells on the Internet, but when it comes to sexting, the numbers are impressive, and not in a good way. Many teens often report that they receive sexually suggestive messages either through text, instant messaging, or e-mail.

The behaviours of teens have always caused parents consternation and frustration, but access to the Internet has created sexual and even pornographic behaviours that are quite worrisome. A report from Australia indicated a huge number of teenage girls and boys have sent or even posted sexually suggestive photos, comments, or content to their girlfriend/boyfriend (71% for teen girls and 67% for teen boys), and 15% of these teens sent semi-nude or nude images to someone they've never met in person, but only "met online".

Teenagers, even more so than adults, are perfectly aware that such suggestive text messages get shared with those who are not the intended recipient, and that goes for semi-nude and nude photos. Because of the "anonymity" of using the Internet, a large percentage of both teenage girls and boys admit they are more "aggressive" or less self-conscious when using sexually suggestive words,
comments or images then they would necessarily be in "real life".

In fact, a large number of teens believe that such messages are required or even expected in order to "hook-up" or date these days. A large number of teenage girls are pressured into sending sexy images or messages following pressure from their boyfriend or another male, although some teenage girls admitted that they did it to be flirtatious or for fun, or they sent the suggestive images of themselves as "presents" for their boyfriend. Many of them think it's just a joke.

The problem is it isn't a joke.

**Impact on body image and relationships**

Since images of what appear to be "perfect" (in reality, often air-brushed and computer generated) females are seen everywhere, girls (especially) and boys believe this is how females should look to be considered attractive. Unfortunately, many females compare these images to how they look and strive for this unrealistic ideal. For boys, body image has also become a major concern, unlike past decades when it did not take precedence in the minds of young males. More research has unveiled the fact that today, even though boys tend to express it much less than girls, they have strong feelings of anxiety concerning their bodies.\(^{[38]}\)

Donna Freitas, author of *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused About Intimacy*, has this to say about porn:

"Many boys learn to assume that the things women do in porn—how they dress and act around men—is also how women are supposed to act in real life. These same boys are learning to expect girls their own age to act like the women in porn videos, too ... Social media and Internet porn are influencing junior-high and high-school girls' understanding of sexiness. Girls are learning to use porn and porn archetypes to impress boys as early as middle school."

These issues of self-concept, body image, and self-esteem tie into being vulnerable to certain forms of cyber bullying. Hence, our next section will dive into the very topic.

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**REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

- Digesting the statistics relating to pornography and sex on the Internet can be dizzying. Rather than think in numbers, think about how much sexual content you are exposed to inadvertently while performing normal tasks such as banking, working, checking emails, etc. Does it register with your conscious mind or do you recall the images/words later on?

- Reflect on ways to approach your family members (if you have not already) to open up a dialogue about safety and impact of pornography and graphic sexual content in an age appropriate manner.
KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

Gone are the days when we believed that just "dirty old men" viewed porn. Now everyone from pre-teens to great grandparents do so - both genders. Who knows, maybe you might have accidentally stumbled upon such material. It is all over cyberspace.

Remember, there's a whole new cyber language filled with abbreviations used by young and old alike. Although you may not be able to "translate", keep an eye on your child's computer screen and be ready to take action if you see something suspicious.

Don't forget, this isn't just a problem for children. The ubiquity of the material allows anyone who is vulnerable a good chance of getting hooked.

If you have children or young people in your life, make a commitment to keep the lines of communication open about cyber sexual exposure and participation. You may be surprised to find they may want to talk but were afraid or embarrassed. Some may be happy to discuss it because they were being either bullied or pressured to participate in these activities.

Others can use posted sexual images for intense cyber bullying.
**Interlude: Get a Cyber Swimming Buddy**

Healthy cyber swimming buddies are those who can help via role modelling and advice to show how to have a healthy routine with the cyber. You, in turn, would help them in a similar way - just like an exercise buddy.

Beware of an unhealthy cyber buddy because they will role model and give advice on how to get into the cyber without setting limits or other functional impact considerations. These might include, for example, belonging to a "clan" for a role playing game where you go raiding a dragon's lair every midnight.... and it begins to impact your morning functions! When you tell your clan buddy this is starting to affect you, watch out if the response is "Your duty is to the clan!" or "Wimp!" or "Start using caffeine!"

Healthy cyber buddies put health first for themselves and their friends.
Part 11

BEACH CYBER-SAND KICKERS: Cyber Bullying & Cyber Stalking

This section covers the following topics:

- An overview of cyber bullying
- Recognizing when it is occurring
- Considerations for early detection and intervention

Cyber bullying is another concern in an already long list of concerns, related to high tech communications. Long-term ramifications of cyber bullying are well documented.

Another potential negative aspect of connectivity

No doubt about it, Internet and technological communication systems and devices are part of today's society. Children born today will grow up in a world that is wirelessly connected regardless of socioeconomic conditions, location, or culture. However, along with this more positive aspect of global communication are also not so positive avenues of bullying, known as cyber bullying. Like other behaviours we have discussed, it too may have potential "addictive" aspects.

Usually the first time someone gets away with "something", they're more apt to do it again. What better scenario to bully or torment someone than from a distance? Utilizing wireless capabilities, the lines between right and wrong are often blurred. No one sees you do it, so what's the big deal? The tormentor can release aggressions and passions without anyone else being the wiser. The same goes for individuals who are prone to bullying others, either online or in physical environments.

Cyber bullying gives people a sense of control, just like it does in the physical environment. What makes it so different than a physical environment is that now, not just a small circle or clique of friends can see that photo, witness the bullying, or personally torment the victim. Now, the cyber-bullying scenario has turned into a free-for-all where the personal reactions, ramifications, and consequences of the bullying action are not immediately visible. This distance effectively "separates" the bullies from the victims, making such torment so much easier and harder to stop.

Call the Internet "the great equalizer". Anyone with access to cyberspace is now just as capable of engaging in bullying or negative behaviours through wireless connections as their counterparts of a generation or two ago. No one is immune.

Are you stalking me?

Cyber stalking is prevalent in the lives of many teens and adults. Using the
Internet or other electronic or wireless devices to harass, pester, stalk or otherwise bother an individual is another phenomenon directly connected to virtual reality.

Harassment through cyber stalking describes any type of unwanted advances or threatening behaviour directed toward someone else using online venues - the Internet or other form of computer communication such as e-mail, message boards, chat rooms, or listening device. Even hidden cameras and GPS technology are common tools of cyber stalkers.

Have you or your loved ones ever gotten an obscene e-mail? Have you or they ever been flamed (harassment through a live chat scenarios is known as flaming), or found an inappropriate message posted to your online guestbook or Facebook™ page?

A study performed by the teenage research firm Unlimited asked 600 teenagers between the ages 13 to 18 how they felt about teenage dating abuse and violence. Approximately 400 stated they were in relationships, and 30% of them admitted that they had been text messaged several times an hour by their boyfriend/girlfriend checking on their whereabouts and/or activities.\[39\]

Eighteen percent of those teenagers in relationships experienced some form of harassment in their social networking sites by a partner. Worse, 17% of the teenagers surveyed claimed that their boyfriend/girlfriend got them to the point where they were afraid to answer their cell phones, look at their e-mails, text, message, or instant message. Roughly 10% had actually received threatening messages or calls.\[40\]

What about your experience in this topic? Have you, or anyone that you know:

- Received numerous e-mails and/or text messages on a daily basis by a "significant other"?
- Received unwarranted or threatening e-mails (including a death threat)?
- Experienced sexting in online e-mails, posts or cell phones, or experienced sexual harassment, and/or created sexually explicit images for transmission via online connections?

If you answered 'yes' to any of the above questions, you may have been, or are, the victim of a cyber-stalker. The key behaviour in such scenarios is control and intimidation. It goes even further; many stalkers have access to "spyware" capabilities or devices that are installed onto a person's cell phone or computer without actually needing physical access to such a device.

This type of technology may also pinpoint victim locations using GPS technologies, and some go so far as to intercept messages, phone calls, and even impersonate the victim.

Unfortunately, a large number of teenagers make themselves more vulnerable to cyber stalking activities if they regularly blog, especially when they divulge so much personal information for public dissemination. It's like leaving all your personal and important documents and papers out on the curb for anyone to
access. Many teenagers don't think twice about posting their first name on public forums, their age, and even their contact information and e-mail addresses.

Teenagers aren't the only ones guilty of disseminating too much private information in public venues. Parents posting their children's photos on social network sites like Facebook™ leave them open to online predators and cyber stalkers.

Adults in general love posting about themselves as well. Cyberspace allows everyone a spot and a soapbox to tell the world about themselves. Often at various talks and presentations I deliver, I like to do a demonstration of how such shared information is so readily available that I can repackage it to shake audience members' belief systems. Really. I mentioned I am an illusionist, so I have also studied many of the methods charlatans have used to convince people that they possessed psychic powers. Believe me, thanks to 21st century cyberspace, it is much easier than ever before. If you meet me in person, I can give a demonstration for you. Don't worry, I will explain exactly how it is done after the fact - I don't want anyone thinking I have psychic powers! I do not. I just know the ways of cyberspace and how the human mind functions. Unfortunately, so do many cyber stalkers - and they do not give explanations for educational purposes.

By asking relatively harmless questions, cyber stalkers and predators are able to gain incredible access to a large amount of private information from online social network venues. Statistics have shown that most Internet stalking scenarios involve someone the victim knows personally.

You might be able to realize when you are being cyber bullied. However, how do you know if your child is being cyber stalked? More than likely, you, or your son or daughter might have picked up on a few clues. Here are just a few:

- Your child or teen spends a massive amount of time on the computer, especially late into the evening.
- Your child or teen is fielding phone calls very late at night, or you find calls to numbers you don't recognize on the phone bill.
- Your child or teen shuts the laptop or turns off the computer monitor when someone else is in their vicinity, or may even begin closing drapes, doors, or windows at home.
- Your child or teen suddenly creates a new e-mail address that you don't recognize.
- Your child or teen receives packages, mail or even gifts from someone you don't know, and he or she is hesitant to tell you about them.
- Teens may become withdrawn from school, school activities, friends, and even families.

Emotions surrounding cyber bullying and cyber stalking are similar. Victims become anxious, angry, helpless, depressed and, in extremes, even suicidal[43]. A victim of cyber stalking or cyber bullying finds it very difficult to really "get away"
from the cyber bully or stalker, and the situation can actually grow quite tense as time passes.

**Don’t fall asleep on the job - maintain awareness!**

The University of Toronto engaged in a survey regarding cyber bullying of children and adolescents. Twenty-eight schools participated, surveying grades 6 through 11. Approximately 4,300 students were surveyed in schools both inside and outside of Canada and within a wide variety of demographics.

Of the students surveyed, 99% said they had a computer in their home and approximately 67% had two or more computers in their home. Nearly two-thirds of the students surveyed said they spent two or more hours a day on their computers. Two-thirds of those students also communicated with their friends over the Internet at least once a day. Approximately 30% of the students said they play Internet games on a daily basis.

Approximately 45% of the students said that their computers were in their bedroom, with other students reporting other public spaces in the home environment. Here's how these surveyed students utilized a variety of Internet sites, some of the most popular being:

- 57% - for homework
- 54% - social networking sites
- 52% - Internet game sites
- 42% - entertainment sites

Nearly half of the students surveyed had a cell phone, and nearly one-third of those students had given out their passwords to a friend. Over half talked on a cell phone once a day or more, and approximately 40% sent text messages at least once a day.

The following discussion relates to their experiences with cyber bullying. In the survey, students were asked if, within the past three months, anyone had been bullied online. Half of the students surveyed said that they had experienced some aspect of cyber bullying during that time period; some of those students had been bullied more than once.

Here are some indicators that you or your child has been a victim of cyber bullying:

- You've been called names or made to feel bad
- You've found out that rumours were being spread about you
- You've found out that someone else was pretending to be you online
- You've been threatened
- You've received unwelcome messages or requests for sexual content, words, suggestions or photos
- You've been asked to do something sexual in nature
You've had your private photos sent to someone other than the intended recipient

In what environments does cyber bullying occur? The list of avenues includes instant messaging, chat, e-mail, Internet game sites and social networking sites as the most common.

Who are the common culprits of cyber bullying?

- Friend?
- Fellow student?
- Stranger?
- Student from another school?
- Unknown?

Sadly, the highest percentage of cyber bullying incidents came from a "friend" or another student from the same school. However, an alarming 13% or 342 of those surveyed experienced cyber bullying behaviour from a stranger, while another 300 didn't know who was bullying them.

When students were asked how they felt, they were asked to choose between answers that range from, nothing, or it didn't bother them, to embarrassed, sad, or scared. While approximately 21% stated that the cyber bullying didn't bother them, 5%, or 240 in total, were scared.

Interestingly, very few of those students who experienced cyber-bullying incidents told a friend, a parent, or a teacher.

**Do you know a Cyber Bully?**

Have you ever witnessed someone else become a victim to cyber bullying? Approximately 28% of those students surveyed by the University of Toronto study had watched someone else being bullied online within the three months prior to the survey.

Nearly 32% said that they had watched but didn't participate, while 21% said they did try to get the person to stop. Roughly 7% of the students surveyed made efforts to befriend the bullied person or reported the bullying to someone else, while 3% objected to the cyber bullying but not to the person responsible for the bullying actions.

Young people these days are very techno-savvy, and most of them are smarter than we give them credit for. As parents, we often think we have our finger on the pulse of our kids regarding their actions and behaviours. In reality, we don't know nearly as much as we think we do.

What are kids being bullied about these days? Likely the same as what we experienced as kids, although we experienced our bullies face-to-face most of the time. Dealing with a bully, whether face-to-face or online, isn't easy; kids today are bullied, in most cases, over the same things that we were bullied for in
our youth. Those reasons include but are not limited to:

- appearance
- race
- school performance
- gender
- sexuality

As mentioned earlier in this book, it's easier to be tough when you're hiding behind a keyboard and a computer screen, especially if you wish to remain anonymous. However, 36% of the students surveyed who experienced online bullying also reported physical bullying in real life scenarios.

What do parents know about cyber bullying and Internet safety? According to the same survey as mentioned above, 96% of the parents surveyed for the study said that they had discussed Internet safety with their children, and nearly 90% actually felt that they knew some, or a lot of, what their child did online.

Nearly two-thirds of the parents surveyed felt that they can protect their children from what floats around on the Internet. At the same time, nearly one-third of those parents were understandably concerned about how much time their child spends on the Internet.

It is not surprising that most parents believe that cyber bullying is definitely a problem. However, most of them believe that their child would tell them if they were being cyber bullied. According to the survey, parents and teachers alike believe that real-life physical bullying and situations regarding cyber bullying are both serious and should be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

**The child who changed**

This is the story of a bright, intelligent and happy 12-year-old boy. He is the privileged type of child whose parents dote on him and are able to provide all of his needs and the majority of his wants - including a computer, smartphone, tablet and flat screen television in his bedroom. Often, as a reward for his excellent grades and good behaviour, he received the latest tech gadget (which he enjoyed and in which he was quite proficient) as gifts from his parents. The generous and good-natured boy was quick to give his older computers, phones and other devices to friends and neighbours when his were upgraded. He also helped fellow classmates and even adults to use the devices they owned.

One summer, his parents began to notice a difference in his demeanour, sleeping and eating habits, and his way of speaking (basically, not at all). One evening, they questioned him if he was feeling okay physically, which was answered with a barely audible grunt and a rolling of the eyes. They discussed the behaviour with one another and came to the conclusion that his behaviour was due to hormones; after all, they reasoned, he is at that age when boys become men.

Imagine their sadness, confusion and absolute shock when, six months later,
their son was expelled from school. Apparently, he had been tormenting a student since the start of the school year (taunting, threatening and other things) because of her weight and ethnicity. This day, however, he became incensed because the other child decided to take a stand and challenge him. He waited for her after school and viciously and physically attacked the student.

For months afterward, the parents wondered what on earth had become of their loving, smart and fun-loving boy. It was not until nearly a year later they found out that he himself had been relentlessly cyber bullied. He held in his fear, anger and sadness; not telling his parents about his predicament.

Do you think the victimization online could have lead to his change in behaviour and, eventually, bullying someone in real life? Do you believe the parents could have prevented this from happening?

The key is to be aware of how social media can have both positive and negative impacts on children and adolescents, and even adults. Are your child's wireless connections and activities dangerous? Do you know if they contact strangers online, or are making arrangements to meet them at the local mall or movie theatre? Do you know if your child has ever posted inappropriate photos of themselves or others online? Keep in mind that not all children or adolescents who are being bullied will ask for help.

Has your child ever been cyber bullied, or, even worse, has your son or daughter bullied someone else or spread gossip online?

These days, streaming, uploading and downloading are common activities for our kids and teens, as are playing games, watching movies and television shows, and accessing social networks. These aspects of our environment are here to stay, but that doesn't mean that we as parents don't have the ability to maintain some structures of control and supervision. After all, the safety of our children and youth depends on it.

**It's a new day entirely**

Unhappiness, resentment, loneliness and other issues were expressed by young people in less technical ways in years past. Today, access to social media venues may have a number of detrimental effects on children, adolescents, young adults and even adults who already have some issues going on in their lives that may include a disability, a family upset such as a divorce, the loss of a friend, boyfriend/girlfriend, and other stressors, including depression.

However, a common appeal of many role-playing games is that it gives an individual the opportunity to pretend he or she is someone else, which may be either a result of social anxiety or contribute to it. Individuals who have dealt with stressful events in their lives can connect with other forums and chat rooms to discuss those dramatic situations, focusing on specific events in their lives. This can offer benefits as well as drawbacks.

Do you know that there are online sites where kids can share their suicidal thoughts and techniques for self-harming? Whether it's experimenting with self-
cutting, drugs, booze, or a choking 'game', both adults and children today have access to environments that can severely exacerbate their issues.

Parents should know and watch for signs of cyber bullying, or signs that their child or someone they know is being bullied. Only then can you take action.

**Stop! Read the signs**

Many of us know that physical aspects of bullying may be readily visible. However, some signs of cyber bullying are not as visible. A child or adolescent may exhibit some of the following signs that they are in trouble:

- Claims of frequent stomach-aches or headaches and/or feeling literally sick or even faking an illness to avoid going to school
- Changes in eating habits (some kids may come from school extremely hungry because the lunch has been stolen or they feel too uncomfortable to eat in a cafeteria setting)
- Difficulty sleeping
- Declining grades
- Lack of interest in school or school work
- Avoidance of social situations or a lack of or loss of friends

A child or adolescent who is being bullied may often feel helpless and exhibit a low level of self-esteem. Other behaviours, including those that are self-destructive, may also crop up, including harming themselves (self-cutting or threatening suicide) or running away from home.

Parents think that if their kids are being bullied their children will say so and ask for help. But many kids won't say anything, fearing they'll be seen as a tattletale, can't handle the problem on their own, or be punished for letting it happen. Many children and adolescents fear the situation will grow even worse if the bullying is out in the open.

Not only that, but a child or adolescent may feel humiliated by the bullying and may not want any adult to know the rumours or gossip being spread about them. The person who feels bullied may already feel some sense of social isolation, and may believe that no one will understand what they're going through, or even worse, care.

The main thing that differentiates cyber bullying from "real time" bullying, aside from the physical ramifications, is that a cyber bully can literally operate 24/7. Messages and images are often posted anonymously. Distribution is lightning fast, and it's often impossible to determine the source of the comment, threat, or image. Once images or comments have been posted or sent, it's nearly impossible to find them all, or even be able to delete them if found.

I also will say again, this all can happen to adults as well.

**Confronting Cyber Bullying**
There are many sites with tips regarding cyber bullying, and a good Canadian one is MediaSmarts. Below are some approaches and suggestions of reducing the chance of or early intervention against cyber bullying:

- Open discussion and dialogue with family members (generally good for many things)
- Children's use of computer/tablet in a family space in the home
- Parents letting children know they will intermittently check their cyber communications, especially if the parents are paying for it all!
- Home and teaching institutions should have rules for ethical online activities.
- Establish clear ways to report abuse to parents/teachers/responsible adults
- Do not share personal information with people unknown or not known well
- Do not share passwords
- Discuss the dangers of posting or texting inappropriate images into the cyber - they can come back in many ways
- Consider all posts online something that can be read by the entire world
- Troubleshoot and prepare communication if a concern arises. Most teenagers who experience cyber bullying do not easily reach out for help
- Often a youth worries that they will be punished by having access removed to the cyber by their parents for getting into the situation
- If one suspects or witnesses cyber bullying, being just a bystander who doesn't report it to responsible adults can actually demonstrate to the bully it is fine to continue or even increase the intensity of the attacks
- Involving Internet or cell phone service providers by informing them of violations of Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) which can act to help identify, track, ban (and other sanctions) a cyber bully
- Report cyber bullying to the police. Cyber bullying can fall into categories of assault, serious threats and more. In Canada, it is illegal to continue to contact a person who finds these communications a threat to their or other's safety
- If under attack, leave the cyberspace area (i.e. stop a game, close a chat box, etc.)
- Ban/block senders of cyber bullying messages
- Do not reply to cyber bully messages
- Save all messages from the cyber bully, as they may be useful for the police and other resources.
- Get involved with institutions you are connected with (schools, work, etc.) to help raise awareness to help create a culture shift of making discussion on this topic easier by helping people to identify it, as well as help those who have grown to accept it as "normal" by shining a light on ways to resist. The key is setting healthy relationships and boundaries with cyberspace and
promoting zero tolerance to cyber bullying.

STOP SPYING ON ME MOM/DAD!!!!

What about the youth who do not want to let you look over their shoulders at what they are typing? The reality is you likely should be involved with your children's cyber activities from when they are old enough to use tech, i.e., age 2 - as that is the time they will allow you to see, until they get old enough that they developmentally want to have some space away from your eyes. The best bet for parents is to raise their kids with Internet literacy, netiquette, and teach them about the wonders and dangers of the cyberspace world.

This is similar to talking to them about drugs and sex. At a certain age, you will not be able to watch over them 24/7 - you can only hope that you raised them to think carefully, weigh their actions, and feel comfortable to turn to you when they do need help.

I have seen many parents covertly set up spy tech to monitor their children's use of cyber, as well as pose with false identities to befriend their sons and daughters on Facebook. Perhaps this might be needed in cases where a person is having severe problems with their behaviour to the extent that he or she has developed a mental health problem or addiction and requires some major support. But even then, parents can tell them up front they WILL be monitoring them. The core to this is maintaining trust with your family members; the discovery of being spied on can drive youth to not only stop talking to parents but enough to inspire them to find clever ways around the spying tech. Parents need to ask, if they cannot trust their children online - why is that? Do they need to have a crucial talk with their kids if that is the case? Be up front and authentic. Everyone values that when it comes to family relationships.

Being a parent is the toughest job in the world and it isn't about making your kids happy all the time. Sometimes, in order to help offspring be savvy and safe, parents must stay tough. My experience is the sons and daughters may gripe at the time but a few years later are so thankful for the parental concerns that helped them develop their healthy relationships with cyberspace.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

• Examine your feelings about cyber bullying. Ask yourself questions such as do you believe it is as prevalent, dangerous or as serious as "real life" bullying.
• Think about how you would handle the situation if you, your child, or a friend were to fall victim to cyber bullying and/or stalking.
• Reflect on the "Confronting cyber bullying" section above. How many of these concepts would you, or have you used? What would seem the easiest thing to implement in your home to help reduce the chances of a cyber bullying situation?
KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

There's no getting around the fact that the entire world is going high tech. Therefore, our children will know only this level, and higher, of technology. Thus, it is up to parents, teachers, and government to learn to read signs, identify dangers and ways to solve problems that may arise from its usage.

Cyber-bullying is easier for some people who may have a tendency to intimidate others because it can be done from a distance without facing the victim.

Keep in mind at all times that sharing personal information on social media websites, blogs and the like increases your risk for cyber stalking and other unwelcome communication. Also a word of caution to parents: posting pictures of your children can display them to not only family and friends but also child predators.
**Interlude: Swimming Aids**

Learning the basics of Internet literacy, common terms and modalities, and basic goals and limit setting are essential for healthy interacting / swimming in cyber!

The use of goggles, floaties, kickboards, flippers, and/or lifejackets for watery adventures are common and sometimes mandatory. Or, when in unsafe unpredictable waters (or those you are not yet familiar with or have mastered) do not hesitate to protect yourself and/or provide aids to help with your swimming! This means parental controls, videogame time settings, setting boundaries and expectations for the use of technology from the beginning, setting safe modes on search engines, and much more.

Swimmers sometimes find wearing a wetsuit for protection a useful tool for buoyancy and insulation. But it may feel weird at first. However, developing the habit of using the right tools and techniques is important. Do not hurry to flip on your "cyber wet suit" - you need to find the right fit, which may be similar to finding the right interfaces, knowing what content is healthy for you, what to avoid, and what not to subscribe to. This does take time and experimentation.

Some swimmers learn a technique called "Drafting." Drafting is swimming close somewhere behind another swimmer; kind of like tailgating a large vehicle, it saves the drafters energy in their own swim. In other words, if you are unsure of something, ask family, friends or professionals about safe and efficient ways of using cybertech.
SWIM SMART: Healthy Relationships between Humans & Technology

This section covers the following topics:

• Setting Guidelines for Cyber Use
• Developing self and family contracts
• Establishing clear communication expectations and boundaries

The permanency of cyber connections, virtual worlds and wireless communications in our lives has been well documented and established. Rather, communications are going to grow faster while devices continue to adapt and offer even greater options for society.

I hope the content of this book has provoked some self-reflection regarding reliance on wireless communication, virtual worlds and instant connectivity in dealing with the struggles and challenges of our daily lives. At this point I want to offer a few guidelines and tips for promoting a healthy relationship between humanity and technology - primarily for parents and families. However, much of what will be discussed can be adapted for adults.

(If there were sufficient interest from the readers of this book, I would happily write a future book on dealing with spouses, partners, and other relations who need to be dealt with as adults - although they may still be functioning in some ways as younger adults. In helping children and youth, I often have found many of the adults in the family had also become linked in unhealthy ways to technology as well. Just let me know.)

When it comes to offering guidelines and limitations regarding use of the tech devices discussed, it's important to be clear. Ambiguity is not allowed; it is imperative to stick to the rules and lead by example without exception.

Tips and Tools for Self-Reflection

Be reasonable when setting guidelines both for yourself and your children or other family members. Start with practical strategies such as:

• Learn how to self-reflect (once in a while, step back and assess your habits)
• Keep yourself healthy (mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually)
• Try to maintain a home life environment that provides a safe haven to recharge your batteries or to reconnect with your loved ones without technology
• Reflect on your work environment - for example, are there guidelines or policies that can be tweaked to create a more healthy relationship with
My work, fairly often, involves helping a person and their loved ones to refocus their attention and behaviours with regard to their everyday environments. As previously discussed, there are limitless reasons why human beings retreat to the Internet.

It is human nature to want the so called "quick fix", especially in today's society where everything can be purchased, eaten, or read faster than ever. So, if you're dealing with anyone who is misusing video games, will it solve the problem to merely unplug the console or computer? No, the fact is that it is not that simple at all.

It's not just a matter of taking away the video game or the computer but determining the reasons behind such behaviours. After all, the reality is that they have too many alternatives (friends, library, and hidden smartphones) to find a way to connect -we all do. It doesn't matter whether the issue is video games, online gambling, shopping, or even attraction to sex or porn sites. It's the "why" that prompts such behaviours that need to be addressed for lasting change.

Parenting is an extremely personal and private issue. Truthfully, it can be said that most parents do their best to raise polite, well-behaved children who are socially aware of the differences between right and wrong, and what is socially acceptable and what is not.

I have also seen parents who feel guilty for various issues, such as working too hard or an inability to connect emotionally, and thus provide games and similar to their family members. Without addressing this factor, the family dynamic system perpetuates and endures. It is interesting that while parents still consider drug use, alcohol use, and drinking and driving among the most serious youth issues they face today, bullying, spending too much time online, and excessive video game playing are also of major concern.

Some individuals would rather face "an Internet problem" than other conditions. There is stigma out there in our world...I have seen families often pleading for certain diagnoses versus having to face that there may be other issues underlying the surface behaviour. Who wants a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder if you can get another one that might have fewer stigmas like Internet Addiction? However, the key is to deal with the actual issues at hand.

By dealing with the reality of a situation, steps can be taken to keep our kids safe in today's high-tech environment. Creating good family values and rituals is key and essential. This includes being able to discuss cyber issues, setting limits on access, content, time, and using some common practical sense. Some of the parents who come to my clinical practice often don't consider that the gaming issues of their child may be driven by depression or other mental health issues.

A classic factor is that due to the nature of virtual commerce and value points in cyber games, the value of a dollar has become unappreciated by many youth as well as adults. It is easier to spend points in a virtual account than hand over physical cash.
Families that create allowance systems with chores and ensure their children actually start paying for certain privileges (e.g. a doll or a virtual doll in a kid's game online) can quickly help charge them with responsibility and understanding of the consequences of running out of money quickly!

Those who reactively provide money to their children are not doing them a favour. This will grow into the smartphone bills and other things parents often cover automatically if they do not stop and reflect.

Young people today, especially in high school, often have access to personal debit cards as well. This access to funds will definitely impact the amount of money your child (or any child) has available to spend on video games, online gambling, and other online activities. The question is - where is the money coming from?

Some studies indicate that by 2015, and as a result of multitasking, the average screen time hours for the average North American adult are expected to rise to 15.5 per day, and this does not include work time! Remember that the Internet is connected and overlaps with other media - television, film and music, through computers, phones, and radio. So it's not just screen time - its media time.

Since these worlds are 24/7, you need to set limits. As always, you should begin by setting these limits for YOURSELF or at least at the same time you want to implement them on others. Here are some guidelines to doing so:

**Basic Limit Setting Guide**

1. **START WITH A LIST OF PERSONAL VALUES YOU BELIEVE IN.**
   Write down what springs to mind. Examples may include Personal Health, Family, Career Excellence, Civility, Transparency, Creativity, and Collaboration.

2. **PREPARE A LIST OF CYBER ACTIVITIES YOU ENGAGE IN.**
   I list broad categories - it is up to you to really fill in the details - such as what type, names, etc. of those activities. Then make similar lists of the following:
   - Work activities (e.g. checking emails, reviewing data, etc.)
   - Personal Business (e.g. banking, ordering items etc.)
   - Leisure (gaming (and which ones), surfing, social media, gambling, watching videos etc.)
   - Personal Community (connecting with family, loved ones, relations, etc. friends, etc.)

3. **LIST THE TIME YOU DEVOTE TO EACH**
   Try to estimate daily, then weekly. Then extrapolate.

4. **LIST EVERY ACCESS POINT YOU HAVE**
   Home computer, work computer, smartphones, videogame consult, etc. Then
record against the activities and time which portals you use for each.

5. CONTENT
Against every activity, please write down various thoughts on the content you are being exposed to. Is it financial knowledge, tasks, pornography, violence, etc.?

6. VALUE CHECK
Review your values and look over what you have written. Do they align? Or do you see some potential problems? Only you can write down how you perceive the reality of your life - and note: your mind may try to trick you by minimizing things you love to do that you know eat up precious resources from your life.

7. WHAT TO DO NEXT:
Let us discuss "self-contracting" before we get into the granular.

**A Self-contract**
Some people think a self-contract doesn't work. Well, it all depends what you expect is the purpose of "contracting". If you think of it as something that is a pass/fail and that you win/lose based upon meeting the terms of the contract and that is all it is for, I'd say - yes, it's pretty useless.

If a goal is not met, rather than beat oneself up and erase any accomplishments reached up to that point - let it be an opportunity to explore and understand the contexts and factors that led to it not being met. Perhaps the reason a goal was not met, i.e. that relapsing into playing a videogame, was better than another choice (e.g. going out to drink heavily) - perhaps not. The key, according to motivational approaches, is to make this a reflection discussion regarding the attempt at the goal. If it is met or if it is not met - both outcomes need to be reflected on to understand why it turned out the way it did. This helps with building on things that work and starting to move away from strategies that are not effective for the specific person. Just because someone else has a strategy to reach a goal does not mean it will work for you! You have to make it personal for yourself.

When I discuss a CONTRACT, I really describe it as a PILOT PROJECT. Meaning, it doesn't truly matter if everyone succeeds at their stated goals. What matters is understanding who tried what, how, and what happened. Through honest reflection, this process can provide a wealth of information on what went well and what might need to be done next time for improvement.

The important factors to consider are:
If it has been a chronic problem, is there any reason to enforce abstinence as the main goal to start with?
If, over time, abstinence is suggested because goals cannot be met (e.g. getting up for school or making it to a work shift), is it due to the trials we set up that it has becomes OBJECTIVELY CLEAR that that you (or a family member) appears
to have a great deal of difficulty in controlling the behaviour? It isn't wise to make radical changes except in crisis situations, because it is important to understand the driving forces of a behaviour to effect change.

Examples of OBJECTIVELY CLEAR GOALS are, "I will only play videogame X from 7:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. on weekdays"; or, "I will clean dishes on Tuesday and Thursday nights." Ambiguity allows twisting of the goals and self-deception. Also, set a time frame. For example, one week, during which time you should evaluate the goal and reflect on your ability to achieve it.

If you are trying to get another to set a personal contract with themselves regarding an internet problem, the person who is identified with the problem needs to buy into the process and see the contract as something helpful. Thus, allying with goals and values to drive the motivational is extremely important. Often, if an arbitrary time is thrown out like, "Off by midnight!" it feels hollow. So, the issues of what impact the behaviour is having on the family and the person, and when, are important.

Being able to monitor the situation and the markers of success are important. Examples of clear behavioural markers are ones that can be objectively agreed to and that have been met, i.e. "Yes it was done, or no it wasn't" or "80% of the time it was done", etc.

You can't usually solve all the problems in the first go - or even the 100th. The goals need to be clear and objectively measurable. I suggest keeping physical notes of the things that worked as well and what might be improved after every cycle of goal setting. I hope you have that reflection journal I suggested you start using from Part 1- it would be perfect for jotting these notes down.

**Family Contracting**

All family members must be held accountable for their own actions, even if the goal is to help the person with the identified cyber problem as the driving purpose. Sometimes in this process, I've found the parents do not follow through on their end or decide to make changes to the contract without discussion. This results in wrecking the purpose of the pilot as well as creating trust issues for the family. Sometimes, as we know, parents and youth are unconsciously invested in keeping things status quo to cloak other problems. Well, as described above, looking at why things work or not will shine the light of reflection on the situation. Also, of course, the young person in the household will be more involved in the contract if he or she sees the rest of the family all trying together.

In short, often a contract created to help one person actually can be morphed into an entire family charter from which all can benefit. If the elements of respect, care, and authenticity are the foundations in these contracts, they have a much higher chance of being adhered to.

Often a contract breaks down because a parent feels bad taking away a game, or the parents have different parenting styles. So, parents may need their own support for developing skills and to gain clarity on what they want as well as how to parent and gain back the feeling of control over their own household.
The key is to help foster internal motivation for driving change towards overcoming their problems, yet carefully balanced with some external motivation from the family. That key is keeping all actions aligned with the goals the family agrees upon. A powerful goal is having the person become more independent and functional. Such an overall goal is usually always agreed upon. It is the creation of behavioural markers and the time frames where things can get complicated.

SAMPLE ITERATIVE CONTRACTS FOR "PAT"

Let us say Pat is a 19-year-old with video gaming overuse issues. Pat lives at home with parents who pay for everything at this time, since he/she moved back after dropping out of college. Pat sits around playing games and does not shower, leaves a mess everywhere, and doesn't seem motivated to get out of the house even for a walk.

NOT A GREAT CONTRACT

Parents and Pat agree to the following:
- No video gaming after bedtime
- No playing videogames during the day until after dinner
- Keep up hygiene
- Do basic chores
- Get up on time without parents' help
- Get a job while not in school
- Do all that and you can continue playing the games

Why is the above contract not so great? Well, the goals, tasks and consequences are too vague and ambiguous. Also, it is unclear if Pat connects any of the points to a goal relevant to bettering his/her situation. Clear goals need to be set which make sense to all involved so that there is motivation for everyone to try to make it work. The tasks need to be designed so behavioural or other markers are clear if they are accomplished or not within a timeframe. Also, the above does set up a lot of potential extra "policing" on the parents' part. Last, the consequences are indeed so vague it is unclear what will happen if Pat does not comply. Let us get granular for a moment:

No video gaming after bedtime. What is bedtime? Also, does that mean Pat can switch to a smartphone and start texting all night? What happens if the parents like to go to bed at 10:00 p.m. and Pat's bedtime is 11:00 p.m.?

No playing during the day. Well, unless the parents take steps to make this happen, as in taking away all technology and returning it at night, or find a way to monitor use at the end of the day - the parents may be setting themselves up for more "policing" that might not even be possible. So, unless parents will take all technology away and make sure Pat can't get it until after dinner (whenever that is), this might not be wise to even include at the moment.
**Keep up the Hygiene.** Again, this needs more clarity. Digging deeper to why this is included will help. For example, is Pat avoiding maintaining healthy hygiene because he/she is too invested in his/her virtual world? Or maybe it is because Pat is suffering from clinical depression.

**Do basic chores.** It is better to list a few key chores, with a time frame, that can easily be seen if they are done or not.

**Get up on time without parent's help.** This one is interesting - as the current situation is that Pat doesn't have anywhere to go at the moment. If Pat was attending school or a job, this adds a level of when the wakeup time should be set. Also, the parents need to reflect whether they should bother to try waking up Pat - it is often better to do less in that regard and remove specific privileges as a consequence of Pat's actions. The danger of trying to drag a son or daughter out of bed, wash them, feed them, and drive them around is that their dependence can increase versus building internal motivation. Some external actions can be agreed upon such as "one wake up attempt" or the parents setting an alarm clock, although this should be made clear in the contract.

**Get a job.** Great! What happens if Pat tries, fully motivated to do so, and there are no jobs available? Are there jobs that are not acceptable? What about volunteering, etc.? Maybe it is better to create steps that can be achieved to make it easier, such as creating a resume, visiting a job centre, etc. What happens if Pat can't get a job because Pat suffers from clinical depression?

**Do the above and you get to play the games.** Well, if all the above is vague, then how does anyone prove it was accomplished, therefore allowing Pat to play? Also, are the games "carte blanche" to the extent that Pat can play a game that sucks up money that the parents will need to pay? What about those dreaded smartphone bills?

Next, let us think of how we could improve the contract. I do not claim this is perfect either - no contract is! It is about setting something up to see how it goes so new iterations can be made to help, resulting in progress for Pat!

**A BETTER CONTRACT**

**GOAL:** Help Pat become more independent and functional.

**OBJECTIVES:** Pat wants to get back to a regular daytime schedule as a step towards becoming more functional. To do that, a working-back logical process is explored: determining when Pat has to leave the house to search for a job or exploring a return to school or similar options; how much time it takes to get ready from waking up to leaving for school; how much sleep is required to be refreshed in the morning; how much time is required for winding down before going to bed, etc. Pat also agrees hygiene is important and some modicum of physical activities would benefit him/her.

**TIME:** From "now" for two weeks whereupon a review of the contract will be held.

**BEHAVIOURAL MARKERS:** Clear, precise, and observable actions that Pat and the parents can agree upon. These are based on helping Pat become more
functional or at least helping determine Pat's level of functionality. They are designed with Pat's input to attempt to create achievable objectives that can be reasonably met.

- No SCREEN TIME/TECH after 10:30 p.m. (Pat will turn off the computer by 10:30 p.m. and take 30 minutes to prepare for going to bed).
- Pat will turn over all technology at 10:30 p.m. to parents (parents will not come seeking and arguing over this, either Pat hands it over or not).
- In the morning, parents leave the smartphone for Pat (as Pat agrees to go without access to the videogame consoles, etc. during the day, which have been locked up the night before)
- At 6:30 p.m., Pat has access to the videogames, etc. until 10:30 p.m. (Although the parents feel 4 hours is still way too much, the fact Pat is going along with this contract as a first step is good for them to see how it goes).
- Pat must shower every 2^{nd} day and clean up the bathroom afterwards.
- Pat will feed and walk the dog daily (breakfast and dinner filling of bowls, 30 minute walk outside in park)
- If Pat requires transport via parents to get to an appointment, this must be negotiated beforehand with an expected ready-to-leave time.
- Pat will demonstrate daily activities in terms of at least 1) job searches 2) volunteering 3) going to appointments by keeping a log the family can review at the end of the day. The point of the review is for the parents to help give useful suggestions and perhaps help in Pat's endeavors, not just "Check! You did it."
- Pat will create an updated resume within the two week time period.
- If Pat does not comply with the above on a particular day, parents will revoke access to the screen time/tech for one day. This allows Pat to do all the agreed upon tasks the next day for receiving access to the tech the following day.
- Parents agree to pay for smartphone, Internet access, etc. for one more month, and then all costs will be transferred over to Pat. (More motivation to get a job!)

It is important to again state that the plan above should make sense to Pat as well as the parents as a step towards Pat becoming more functional and achieving his/her goals. Pat should be monitoring his/her successes as much as or more than the parents. Each of the points above tie into the goal of Pat becoming more independent. The other goal that goes along with this may be the parents learning how to allow Pat to become more independent!

If Pat meets all the goals, then he/she and his/her parents can discuss increasing the tasks in accordance with helping Pat achieve greater independence. Also, as Pat becomes more independent, more flexibility with the use of technology can be agreed upon. Chores added could be ones Pat would be expected to do if living independently. Perhaps contributing money as "rent" to help with food
costs may be a consideration in a future iteration.

The key is setting a contract and adjusting it after a period of time based on how goals evolve and having all involved support those goals.

It is important to note again the contract also acts as a method to uncover the underlying factors driving the behaviour. For example, if Pat is suffering from depression, which prevents him/her achieving the objectives, the experience of the attempts may shed new light on the situation. For example, perhaps the entire family notes when Pat has no access, he/she just lies in bed, sometimes crying; the hygiene does not improve as Pat says there is no point, as life is hopeless; even without the tech Pat has insomnia, and so on. The family may begin to see what they thought was laziness is actually something medical in nature and a new strategy can be created to match the intensity of need for the situation. The contract might then shift to "attending treatment/support" rather than getting a job.

Contracting is not simple. I am thinking I might have to write an entire other book on this one topic - feel free to send me feedback if you wish this to be a companion book to this one.

Setting virtual boundaries- more self-contracting

Have you set for yourself virtual office and home hours? What are they? Do you have boundaries/goals for when you are involved with cyberspace? Have you communicated this to others? If you never have, that is fine. But consider setting some limits such as:

* VIRTUAL HOURS

WORK: When do you officially let others know you are available to Skype, answer emails and so on? When do you start and when do you end? Can someone from work send you an email on Sunday evening and expect you will answer it?

HOME: When do start and end your connections for family and friends? Is 3:00 a.m. still ok? Did you protect that lunchtime on a Sunday you reserved for family meal?

* HOW YOU CAN BE REACHED?

How should people reach you and what expectations should they have during the times you are available?

E-MAIL: Perhaps email can be used for non-urgent matters and senders can expect 24 hours before a response during workdays?

TEXT or similar: Could you use texting for urgent updates and give yourself one hour to return the message?

PHONE CALLS: Call if emergency, perhaps even during non-work hours? Of course, perhaps phone calls or Skype are fine when they are already scheduled in the work week as part of regular work meetings.
* TECH FREE TIME

Schedule a few times during the week where there is no cyber use. For example, Sunday morning for 3 hours. A family dinner Friday night. A planned weekend. Some tips below will help.

It doesn't matter what exactly you choose, so long as you choose something! You may have to balance it against work and home contexts - but the more you can create consistency and set healthy boundaries, the more control you have over cyber connections.

* CYBERFREE ZONES

Create a space in the home where no cyber activities should occur. This can be a space set out for reflection - like one's favourite chair. Or maybe a bathroom - some people can get lost in a bathroom when they take a tech tablet with them...

* FILL TIME AND SPACE

To help get away from the cyber and create a more dynamic balance, plan ahead by preparing and setting activities to take up the time and space. These activities should be something you want to do, not just something you actually have no interest in - or else you will be longing for the cyber to relieve the boredom!

So, making dates, family outings, dinner reservations, taking a new class, learning a new hobby, and similar are important. One of my favourite books, the Artist's Way by Julie Cameron, discusses the importance of an Artist's Date. I'd actually recommend you pick that book up and do the Morning Pages.

Please note - you don't have to get rid of ALL technology every time you are doing something healthy. It's a question of looking at what you are trying to achieve.

Reviewing your goal sheets, if you are trying to reduce video gaming so you can devote more time to hiking...great! However, you may want to bring a GPS friendly smartphone or similar for navigating terrain.

The point is to develop and maintain healthy relationships with the technology - not deciding you must be totally abstinent. There are times you might want to just have a break from it all for a few hours or days or even a week. Yet in the 21st century - you will be back at some point.

If you do not plan wisely, you may experience "withdrawal" from cyber where you want to do what you normally have done - and fill the boredom of unplanned time and space with cyber activities. So delete games and similar from a smartphone and leave the hiking apps on if that is what you are trying to do. If you find hiking is boring - that is okay! Find something else!

Dynamic balance is important - so remember I am not advocating cold-turkey cutting off all contact. You might still like checking emails on Sunday night before work because you personally find this works for you. You need to find the right
balance for you and realize it will change with context, time, and situations you live through. That is okay!. Day by day, reflect and make healthy choices.

This book has all been about reflection so you can then take steps that make sense for you and your loved ones. Why do people look for simple solutions to weight control when all we really need to know is to research the food we eat, control portions and perform exercise? Why do people who smoke keep smoking even though they know the risks?

I may have just have told you all the things you may intuitively know have to be done to set the healthy relationship with the cyber world. But without reflection on why you haven't done it already and what might be hindering you - your goals may fail. The more self-aware you are (which is already a step away from distraction from the stimuli of virtual worlds) the more control you will have in swimming in the cyber!

**Using cyber connections for getting physically healthy**

As mentioned, technology is not good or bad - it is how you use it! Besides avoiding it and taking breaks - you can also use the connections to motivate you to move physically. There are many "fitness buddy" wristbands that vibrate or flash if you've been sitting too long or to keep track of your walking. Great thing to have for external nudges once in a while - especially if you work in an office setting or other sedentary job (like mine).

With increasing frequency, doctors are recommending that their patients try wearing tech devices to help monitor health related issues. Many helpful devices are available that count calories that you burn, how many steps you take and even whether you slept restfully. Some patients (and doctors) have used these tools successfully to lose weight, control diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, and other health-related issues. Consider whether you can incorporate such a tool in your cyber swim to help you get physically healthy. These devices and similar tele/cyber medicine tools are growing, as more examples for helping seniors age at their own home in their own communities rather than having to go to a supportive residential setting.

**Take the PURGE! UNSUBSCRIBE!**

This may or may not be more painful- you be the judge...

I did this for myself and it is quite freeing! The challenge I now ask you to consider is this:

Unsubscribe from every email list that is not essential for your wellbeing.

It took me about a month to do it, as I had accumulated so many by saying "yes" to the little box that is already filled out on websites saying "You want to get mail from us?"

If you read this book, the instant gratification factor is quite powerful through emails; deals and amazing promises that flood people's inboxes daily... often for things that may sit on shelves or are never used at all, or never redeemed.
It took a month for me because some places you sign up to have multiple email topics - so you need to unsubscribe all of them from the home base. Basically, what I did was to unsubscribe from every ad-based email I normally deleted anyway. I would follow the tiny font, those hard to find "unsubscribe" links at the bottom of webpage. Then you finally get to the UNSUBSCRIBE site. You need to be careful not to accidentally re-subscribe (some sites set it up in ways that make it confusing or hard to click the right things to escape).

Now my email boxes are not teeming with dozens and dozens of emails that also offer "great deals" that can tempt me to buy things that I really don't need. If I need something, I will devote my own time under my own control to search for things and look for deals.

It is freeing to not have to browse through a hundred emails to delete each day. See what you can purge - get rid of every needless connections that you put on autopilot (i.e. push notifications, email lists, etc.).

Do you really need push notifications for everything from your apps? Choose to keep ones you actually find essential. For example, if you are using a fitness app, maybe you do want it to PING, "Hey you have been sitting for an hour, get up and walk around!" - and get rid of "Your virtual bunny misses you - please come and spend money to feed it!" - unless that cyber-bunny really is essential to your life!

Now if you actually feel sad or empty that you are not receiving a few dozen emails every morning, this might just be withdrawal. If you are still sad after a month of not getting tons of shopping e-deals, blog entry notifications that you really never plan to read, and so on - reflect on this carefully. You may have a cyber issue you really need to focus on changing.

**The Dynamic Balance**

When looking for a healthy relationship between technology and humanity and dealing with problematic behaviours, it's important to understand some of the risk factors and reasons that a person may lean toward the Internet for companionship or engagement rather than interaction with real people.

Lack of social support, depression, and anxiety are some of the main risk factors that lead to overuse or compulsive behaviours and use of virtual reality. People who are unhappy or dissatisfied with their life are also vulnerable, as well as those who are less socially active or able to get out and about.

How to deal with it? First of all, it's important to recognize what may be causing or supporting the over-reliance on the Internet. Try asking yourself a few questions when it comes to balancing your life between your cyber world and your real-life environment.

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**REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

- What kind of social interaction or activities do you miss out on because
you're spending that time on the Internet or video gaming? Write down some of the invitations, gatherings, social activities, sports activities, or other real-life situations you have missed in the past month because you decided you would rather be on the Internet. Check out your access points, the content you are exposed to, and the time you spend on it.

• Consider writing out a family guide or manifesto on setting a family approach to the use of technology in the home based on healthy values (hopefully before you bring it in the home - but late is better than never). Consider the input of all and base limits/contracts on healthy goals of independence, responsibility, self-reliance, and family cooperation.

• Develop new ways to "stay connected" off-line. For example, live theatre, music venues, visits to museums, parks, the beach, movies, all offer opportunities not only for social interaction, but also visual and aural stimulation that doesn't come from a monitor.

• Try to start breaking up your habits and routines. If you find yourself chronically drawn to the computer or the Internet in your free evening hours, find something else to do instead.

• Healthy connections to the Internet can involve a blended approach such as fitness trackers. Consider if the use of one may benefit your life!

• Create your first self-contract! Good luck!

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KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

Lead by example. Be a good role model - especially to yourself. Assess and monitor your own usage before you ask your family to do the same.

Encourage involvement in non-computer and non-Internet related activities, events, and interests.

Use technology that can motivate physical activity.

Be willing to talk about your own issues, as well as the issues of your kids, your friends, or your peers when it comes to their Internet behaviours. Express your concern for someone who you feel may be leaning toward a problem with his or her online behaviours.

Encourage individuals you care about who may be dealing with cyber problems to consider getting help, and consistently offer your support while they do so. Dealing with such individuals is not easy, and getting someone to admit they have a problem is the hardest part. Don't be judgmental, but rather, be consistently supportive and encouraging.

If you find dealing with problematic behaviours exhibited either by yourself or
another becomes too much for you to handle, it’s important to know that you can access help when it comes to therapy, counselling and group support for Internet "addictions", and behaviours. I am closing out this book by offering guidance on the benefits of professional help, and when and where to seek it.
**Interlude: Out to Sea**

Sometimes it is important to acknowledge when you are over your head and in danger of drowning. Reaching out to others includes seeking professional help when required. It may also include asking friends and family to assist in pointing out when you go past limits and to help you stick to goals.
Part 13

**LIFEGUARDING: External help**

This section covers the following topics:

- When to seek help
- Help for the person and the family
- Types of therapeutic approaches

My hope was to have you reflect on the various facts about cyber behaviours, educate regarding how to best interact with the cyber world, and to dispel myths about addiction. Throughout this book, you may have asked yourself how a behaviour (such as gambling, gaming, sex, porn, shopping, and excessive Internet use) can be considered equally dangerous and detrimental as other types of addictions. I also hope you can see that technology, when used in a healthy way, can improve your life.

**The ramifications of behavioural problems**

Most people understand the physiological impact and effect that drugs have on the body as well as the brain. However, growing numbers of experts also believe that any activity, performed excessively and even obsessively, may interfere with a person's ability to function "normally" and, therefore, can be considered an addictive behaviour. Rather, as described previously, many of the driving forces under the behaviour might include mental health and other issues.

When dealing with such behaviours associated with the Internet, it's not just a matter of "removing the temptation" or even reshaping such behaviours. Rather, it involves treating the person as a person; dealing with the context/system they are part of, and taking time to understand the issues before making any radical treatment decisions. Working on biological, psychological, social, cultural, family and even spiritual aspects are all important for dealing with a human being in a holistic way.

For example, consider a person with problematic gambling who brings cultural and even religious beliefs into their gambling behaviours. A person addicted to online shopping, and with hoarding tendencies, may have grown up during the Great Depression, or in a household where every bit of food, clothing, or purchase was valued to the point where it was used until it couldn't be used anymore. Children brought up in broken or abusive homes may grow extremely attached to certain items or behaviours that bring them comfort and a sense of permanency or control.

Problems appear when such behaviours, attitudes and upbringing cause the individual difficulty in merging with social environments or in day-to-day functioning.
Some people are too embarrassed (or fearful of judgment or ridicule) and do not ask for help. For the same reasons they may hide their problems from family, friends, and those in their work or school environments.

Admitting there is a problem and a loss of control is a scary thing for most people. Our society also sometimes conveys strong messages such as the stigma of being "too weak" to be able to handle our own problems, or the fear of being labelled with some diagnosis that may make people judge us in harsh ways.

However, the ability to get to the root of the problems and/or obtaining practical techniques to tackle the issues are some of the greatest benefits for seeking professional help. Obtaining assistance from a professional in the field - a counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or other health professional, provides the opportunity for risk factors and vulnerability issues to be discussed.

Do you have poor coping skills? Are you under a great deal of stress? Do you have a history of family issues or even a trauma that may have contributed to the problem? Do you know if you have, or have a family history, of mental health disorders that may contribute to your vulnerability or susceptibility to such "addictive" behaviour patterns and behaviours?

There is a growing movement in the health care field to broaden the concept and understanding of behavioural addictions, especially those associated with our high tech, Internet-driven society. Many of these issues can be just as detrimental to overall mental health and physical wellness as substance abuse problems. Due to this, various problems with video gaming, Internet and other cyber activities are springing into existence.

The trouble is that this is still a relatively new field. Therefore, beware of treatment programs and approaches that focus on total abstinence or trying to entirely stop the problematic behaviour without considering a person as a whole bio-psycho-socio-cultural-spiritual being: it is important to deal with other concurrent issues that might be driving the behaviour.

Treatment may occur in various contexts including individual, group, couple, or family sessions. Depending on the issues and behaviours, group support can be normalizing, and an effective way to develop coping skills.

Potentially problematic behaviours exist on a continuum of severity, from healthy to severely disordered. For this reason, appropriate interventions also range in intensity, and may include anything from self-help books to brief interventions to more involved treatments that address co-occurring disorders.

Individuals with a behavioural addiction who are otherwise functioning well usually have the resources and support to make effective use of briefer interventions. Those with multiple issues underlying their behavioural problem will need longer-term and more comprehensive treatment.

Cases where the problematic behaviour is entangled with complex issues (e.g., a person with problem gambling with severe financial losses leading to family breakdown, loss of job and housing, extreme stress, emotional crisis) require a
good deal of support during the process of recovery pursuing healthy goals.

Treatment should address the behaviour problem and co-occurring issues as simultaneously as possible. Some issues may take priority over others, depending on their severity or urgency. It is important to keep a focus on addressing the behaviour itself and not just underlying driving forces (whatever they may be). Problem behaviours may be used chiefly as coping mechanisms, but their effects can be serious in themselves, particularly when the consequences are part of a negative and downward spiral. Even when the original pre-existing issue has been dealt with, the outcomes can remain with a person for years.

For example, in the clinic for behavioural problems where I work, we treat many people with gaming addiction who also have Asperger's syndrome and/or mood disorders, as well as difficulties engaging socially. Teaching social skills to these individuals in a group setting can be particularly helpful.

**Involving family and/or significant others**

In my practice, I try, whenever possible, to involve the family when helping a person with cyber problems. Focusing only on the individual may result in many key perspectives being overlooked. Certainly, a chance is missed to help the whole family unit, which can be both profoundly affected by the problem and instrumental in its resolution. Issues in the family also frequently predate the behaviour that brings a person into treatment. On a systemic level, the family dynamics may, in fact, support the problem behaviour. For example, parents who are invested in avoiding an empty nest may not address their child's gambling or video gaming problems if it is keeping the young adult at home and dependent on the parents.

Significant others in the patient's life may need help aligning with and supporting the goals of the therapy, particularly when they are wary of interventions that seem to threaten entrenched dynamics.

Families need to have their own concerns and needs heard. They also need information about the behavioural problem and any mental health issues so they can put what they see in context and respond to it appropriately. Just educating family members or helping them adapt their style of "assistance" can sometimes greatly enhance the treatment outcome.

Healthy communication should be promoted so that family members can feel free to express feelings, thoughts and needs effectively. Video gaming problems in youth often relate to parents’ difficulties with boundaries and setting limits, so effective parenting should be a focus when treating these families. Having specific action plans goes a long way toward supporting developmental changes; think of them as the steps involved in preparing to send a child away to university.

Healthcare and medical professionals understand that at a clinical level, therapists must delve deep into the causes of the behaviour, and what a certain activity means for each and every individual. In other words, how do the actions,
the functions, and the results of those behaviours affect the individual?

However, before going to an entire program, a great initial step (depending on the context of the situation) can include visiting these professionals:

- FAMILY DOCTOR
- NURSE PRACTITIONER
- COMMUNITY WORKER
- SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR, etc.

Going to someone whom you may have some trust or familiarity with can help start the discussion regarding these behaviours. Also, such professionals likely can help provide referrals to the appropriate resources.

CLINICAL THERAPIST

A clinical therapist will assess behavioural addictions by completing an assessment, which means determining the history, patterns, frequency, and impact of any problem behaviour. The therapist will also ask about any previous attempts to reduce or stop those activities. Family history is also extremely important, as family dynamics affect every individual differently, and some circumstances may come with a higher risk factor as well as consequences. An individual's employment history, education and social support network are also assessed, as are physical and mental health or any additional and contributing issues. The therapist will also want to know about a person's goals and motivations.

PSYCHOLOGIST

A referral to a psychologist may be appropriate, as this professional can assess for such things as learning disorders, ADD, or sub-clinical issues such as learning processing issues - all which might be relevant to why the person may have developed maladaptive behaviours using the Internet.

PSYCHIATRIST

A psychiatrist may also be of value when mental health issues are suspected. When there is a severe functional decline as part of the cyber behaviour situation, almost invariably mental health issues are part of the clinical picture.

Treatment plans are determined on an individualized basis, depending on the issues, the individual, and contributing factors. Appropriate interventions may also differ in their intensity or approach, based on the presence or lack of co-occurring disorders or issues.

In many cases, therapy must necessarily deal with a problem that is combined with other and often complex issues. For example, an individual with an online gambling addiction may have experienced a financial crisis or loss that has, in turn, led to the break-up of a family or relationship, job loss, or loss of a home. In turn, such circumstances may have led to extreme emotional crisis and stress. In such a case, the approach, duration, and type of interventions, treatments or
therapies may be more complex than with a person who does not have those co-contributing factors to deal with.

In best-case scenarios, treatments are designed to focus on not only the behaviour problem itself, but also co-occurring issues at the same time, or at least as often as possible. Depending on the individual scenario, some issues are more important than others, such as the impact, severity, or in how a person views their problem.

**Cognitive behavioural therapy** is one modality that is commonly used by therapists to explore, assess, as well as confront certain "triggers" to certain behaviours. For example, a person's impression of their place in society may be directly involved with their addictive behaviour. A person who plays videogames for hours on end may feel that no one likes him in "real life", but has no trouble making friends or contact in a gaming environment.

Cognitive behavioural therapy confronts such impressions or distortions so that the individual can develop more balanced perceptions and awareness of him or herself within their environment. In identifying these triggers or negative thoughts, the therapist can then develop other ways in which the individual can build more effective attitudes as well as skills for coping and problem solving.

**Other Psychotherapies**

Motivational Interviewing, dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), psychodynamic psychotherapy and other treatment techniques may be used to help an individual recognize and regulate emotions. The treatment plan can include trauma counselling, mindfulness or other modalities, depending on the issues involved.

**Medications**

The best case for using medication to address excessive behaviours is when there is a clearly indicated co-occurring mental health problem, such as anxiety, depression or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In general, improvements in the problematic behaviour can be expected. Once identified, mental health problems are addressed through therapy and/or medication, if indicated. Relief from depression, for example, will give an individual more energy to try alternatives to the problematic behaviours. Individuals with ADHD will find it easier to both resist impulses and to engage successfully in more everyday activities.

Clinical trials of medications for behavioural addictions have shown some promise (Grant et al., 2010). Yet this still needs much further research: the people involved in these unreplicated trials had different conditions and were quite varied in several factors (context, family history, background, etc.).

There are best practice principles for individuals with concurrent mental health and addiction issues. Health Canada has sets of guidelines that people in the field, especially in Ontario, can use to guide their treatment decision-making. They can also easily be found online.
EPILOGUE: Back to shore

This book has covered a wide variety of issues when it comes to attraction, connection, and reliance on cyber connections. Whether those connections are used to escape from reality, for stress relief, for work, school, or connecting with friends, the virtual world provides a co-existing universe for us to enjoy. As with everything, reflecting on maintaining a dynamic balance is key.

Take the time to access your attraction and connection to your wireless worlds. Take a step back and assess your own attitudes and behaviours, and do the same with your loved ones. Be aware, be educated, and be willing to set boundaries and explore alternatives if you feel that you or a loved one is getting a little too attached to his or her technical devices.

Please reflect on the material here. Using tools is easier once you understand how they are truly relevant to you - or customize them to your specific circumstances.

It's not easy to change attitudes and perceptions, especially when everyone else around you is engaged in such behaviour. The virtual worlds are here to stay. Social media is here to stay. Access and connectivity to online gambling, shopping, gaming, and even sex and porn are not going to go away - if anything, access to such environments is only going to grow.

I hope you will consider developing or maintaining a healthy dynamic balance between virtual realms and the physical world. Through the knowledge given, techniques suggested, and assistance recommended, may you swim your way through calm cyber waters!
RESOURCE LINKS

Problem gambling
Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre
www.gamblingresearch.org
Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario
www.problemgambling.ca (search for "Introduction to process addictions")
Responsible Gambling Council
www.responsiblegambling.org

Internet addiction/policy suggestions & More Tools
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
www.camh.ca/en/hospital/Pages/home.aspx
Centre for Online Addiction
www.netaddiction.com
TechAddiction: Internet & Video Game Addiction Treatment Centre
www.techaddiction.ca

Sex Addiction
Sex Help
www.sexhelp.com
Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health
www.sash.net

Shopping Addiction
Shopaholic No More
www.shopaholicnomore.com
Shopaholics Anonymous
www.shopaholicsanonymous.org
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As an award-winning psychiatrist, Dr. Bruce Ballon brings more than two decades of experience in cutting-edge mental health clinical treatment, innovative education, novel simulations, psychodynamic coaching, group facilitation, and creativity enhancing techniques for teaching and training to individuals and groups.

He is an Associate Professor for the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine and Adjunct Professor for the University of Ontario Institute of Technology Faculty of Health Sciences.

Among his long list of accomplishments, Dr. Ballon is the lead developer of the Advanced Clinical and Educational Services (ACES) for Problem Gambling, Gaming and Internet Addiction at the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. He has also acted as a consultant regarding addiction and mental health issues for many healthcare professional organizations. He has written books for children, parents, and the general public on youth and family health issues.

Additionally, Dr. Bruce Ballon is the Director of Education for SIM-one (Ontario Simulation Network of Excellence). He also consults widely as an Academic Educator for the Centre for Faculty Development at the University of Toronto.

Dr. Ballon is a sought-after speaker for national and international meetings. His specialized interests include various forms of media and their relationship with addiction and mental health issues. He is considered an expert in the area of simulation and experiential interactive techniques. He has designed a variety of novel educational and therapy initiatives involving the use of film, television, the Internet, videogames, theatre, magic, mentalism and art.

Dr. Ballon has been a consultant and advisor to a variety of media-related activities including television, plays, novels and film productions to help create accurate portrayals of psychiatric and addiction elements. He also works with industries involved in interactive technology and games for understanding their impact on peoples' lives. He has also created games dealing with mental health and addiction issues that have garnered him awards from the Games Manufacturers Association. He has also received rewards from international literary and academic associations.

Dr. Ballon is an Illusionist who performs magic and mentalism, as well as a collaborator and consultant for professional magicians around the world.
THANK YOU FOR READING!
I invite you to share your thoughts and reactions at:

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THE SWIMMING IN CYBER LinkedIn™ GROUP

www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=8211208

Follow me on Twitter at:

@bruceballon
Endnotes

[1] Borg is a collective proper noun for a fictional alien race that appears as recurring antagonists in various incarnations of the Star Trek franchise. The Borg is a collection of species that have been turned into cybernetic organisms functioning as drones of the Collective, or the hive. ... Borgs force other species into their collective and connect them to "the hive mind"; the act is called assimilation and entails violence, abductions, and injections of microscopic machines called nanoprobes. The Borg's ultimate goal is "achieving perfection". - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borg_(Star_Trek)

[2] You may have printed this out. Did you know since the advent of emails, the use of printing on paper has increased? Yes, it is amazing how some technology results in ironic effects.

[3] The NET television website has a documentary video on the growing trend of youth gaming/gambling. The video, Growing Up Gambling - 30 Minute Video includes research, real life stories and other resources and information.


[6] From the USA, some trends: http://money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/mutual-funds/articles/2013/10/24/are-technology-costs-killing-your-budget

[7] With the rapidity of time, perhaps I have dated myself again. Yet, the threat of "Borg" predates that term as well... hailing back to the warnings of prolific writers of speculative fiction such as Philip K. Dick's works (Blade Runner / Do Androids Dream of Electronic Sheep?) and Ray Bradbury (Fahrenheit 451) of the technological and virtual worlds melding into our human existence - with potential dire consequences if ethics, morals and difficult questions are not addressed...


[9] Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" and Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electronic Sheep" are but two examples.

[10] Resist becoming a Borg!


[12] "Virtual Unreality: Just Because the Internet Told You, How Do You Know it's True?" Jul 1 2014 by Charles Seife

Rather than bore you with a ton of scientific literature references, there are already many articles out there summarizing this topic. Here is one for example:

www.health.com/health/gallery/0,,20707868,00.html

Note: Since the group agreed that using the hand-held was now part of the presentation for confirming these points, this was an appropriate deviation to the guideline, i.e., it served to add to the discussion and bring people together in a focus, versus being used to divide attention away from the group discussion.

A very interesting article on the McLean's website defines and provides a lot insight on the concept of Generation Z: www.macleans.ca/society/life/get-ready-for-generation-z/

NCPG reports that each year an estimated 2 million adults in the United States meet the criteria to be considered pathological gamblers.

www.ox.ac.uk/media/news_stories/2013/131031.html


www.huffingtonpost.ca/romeo-vitelli/facebook-suicide-effect_b_1153349.html

http://metro.co.uk/2008/11/21/bodybuilder-commits-suicide-live-on-web-while-viewers-abuse-him-170682/

2011 American Society of Addiction Medicine [ASAM] short definition


www.digitaljournal.com/article/353047

www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201110/your-smartphone-may-be-making-you-not-smart

www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/03/20/video-games-may-reinforce-racist-stereotypes-study-finds


I often talk to AppleTM store employees who have told me they had to cut off their iTunesTM accounts because they was draining all their funds. A dollar here and there, even with a discount, is subtle and insidious. I have a feeling this is not unique to AppleTM employees!

An article at DealJoy.com provides interesting statistics on online consumer shopping; including geographic locations with the most shoppers and the effect social media has on online shopping habits. www.dealjoy.com/how-many-people-shop-online—shopping/


[34] www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/01203/6700-eng.html


[38] http://mediasmarts.ca/body-image


[40] www.safetyweb.com/cyberstalking

[41] Although cyber bullying alone may not be the cause - the advent of clinical depression or other vulnerable factors may combine to result in suicidal thoughts and behaviours


[43] www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/10/131030111316.htm

[44] See in Part 3 "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to a Talk About Internet Misuse"

[45] Although sometimes the "identified problem" person is just the tip of the iceberg, where often many members in a family are having their own problems as well.

[46] Policing - yes, that is what parents label it when I've met with them regarding these situations.


[49] www.cnsaap.ca/ENG/PROFESSIONALTOOLKITS/TREATMENT_ISSUES/CONCURRENTDISORDERS/Pages/default.aspx

[50] www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/adp-apd/bp_disorder-p_concomitants/support-