

Connection Practice #2

Unplug and Connect

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Duration: Flexible

Frequency: Weekly

Level of Difficulty: Easy/Moderate

Overview: In recent years, technology has transformed many parts of our lives, including our interpersonal relationships. Although social media has on the one hand helped facilitate relationships with those around us, several studies have shown that the quality of these relationships has begun to suffer. Indeed, research shows that there is no substitute for genuine, face-to-face, interpersonal connection. This sort of connection nourishes us, and has been shown to have powerful positive effects on our physical and emotional health.

Instructions: We are more connected now than ever. With the tap of a button or the opening of a mobile app, we can reach out to loved ones who may be hundreds or thousands of miles away. But underneath this miraculous change to our world is a somewhat darker truth: The quality of our interpersonal relationships has begun to fray. Indeed, more people report feeling lonely and isolated than at any point in recent history.

Take a moment and reflect on the presence of technology in your life. From your smartphone to your tablet, from your television to your computer, consider the level of interaction you have each and every day with technology in your life. Reflect on how often you find yourself paying attention to your phone or other piece of technology when you are physically with other people. From e-mail, to text messages, to various apps and sports scores, technology has a powerful pull on us, and often draws us away from those we care about most.

For the coming week, choose one interpersonal activity and commit to making it “media free”—no smartphones, no television shows, no texting—just you and the other person. This might mean having a quiet dinner with your spouse, sharing a lunch with a colleague, or going on a hike with a friend. Whatever you choose, commit to sharing that activity fully with the other person.

Once you're done, use the prompts to briefly write down some of your experiences:

▪ *Activity that I engaged in technology-free:* _____

▪ *Was it easier or more difficult than I expected?* _____

▪ *What was it like emotionally to be fully with the other person?* _____

▪ *Did they seem to notice the difference?* _____

▪ *How was this time different than normal?* _____

How and why it works: Fostering our interpersonal relationships is one of the most powerful methods to increasing our happiness according to numerous studies. Although technology and social media has in many ways helped to facilitate our connections with others, the quality of these connections has suffered as a result of some of these changes. This exercise invites you to slow down, unplug, and promote some more genuine and meaningful connections in your life.

