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Technology Unplug Protocol ***Technology Withdrawal Plan for Families***

What do you mean by technology?

Technology is defined as TV, video games, internet, cell phones, tablet, and all hand held devices. Technology referenced in *Unplug Protocol* is for entertainment purposes only e.g. not music, or technology used for vocational or educational purposes.

How do I know if my family or child(ren) has a problem?

Technology usage patterns are set by parents, and therefore if a child or youth is overusing or is addicted to technology, generally their parents have similar issues. Therefore, it is imperative for all family members to participate in a family technology *Unplug Protocol* in order to get their family back on a healthy track.

Symptoms associated with technology overuse or addiction are:

- ✓ developmental delay
- ✓ obesity/overweight
- ✓ sleep deprivation/fatigue
- ✓ depression
- ✓ anxiety, agitation
- ✓ tantrums
- ✓ anger, aggression, violence
- ✓ social phobias
- ✓ attention deficit, learning difficulties
- ✓ poor school performance

If your child or family has any of the above symptoms associated with technology overuse, they may benefit from a Technology Unplug intervention. If a child or family has severe symptoms, meaning excessive and uncontrollable symptoms, it is strongly suggested that the family receive the assistance of a counsellor who specializes in technology management, prior to engaging in the Technology Unplug Protocol.

Technology Unplug Protocol

The following *Unplug Protocol* is designed to enable families to better understand their usage of technology, and guide them toward a protocol that results in more balanced usage of technology and healthy activity. The *Unplug Protocol* is a four step plan to *wean*, or in some cases *lean*, your family off technology. Designed by pediatric occupational therapist Cris Rowan, the *Unplug Protocol* consists of the four R's – *Rate*, *Reset*, *Reorder* and *Rules*. The *Unplug Protocol* enables families to explore the changes technology has caused to their family structure, and envision a new and healthy future.

- 1) **Rate:** identify technology usage amount.

Many families have no idea how much technology they actually use on a daily basis, and consequently often overuse technology without conscious thought. While one can easily see

the effects of overeating, overusing technology is more ubiquitous. Child technology usage often follows that of the highest using parent, as this parent inadvertently encourages high technology usage in all family members to normalize or condone their own high usage rates.

2) **Reset:** determine time period required to “unplug” from all technology.

Families who are heavy users of technology, often don't know each other, and consequently don't feel comfortable in social situations with family members e.g. dinner, holiday's, and as a result, use more technology. The more time spent using technology, the more disconnected are your family members. Disconnecting from technology, and reconnecting with family members, can be threatening and difficult. Start by having dinner together as a family, without technology.

3) **Reorder:** replace time spent using technology with alternate activities.

Technology kills a lot of time which could be filled with more healthy and inter-connected family activities. Many families have no other activity pursuits than technology, and need to spend time to schedule in alternative activities. Suggest development of family theme nights e.g. Monday – bake cookies night, Tuesday – board games night etc. to get started with scheduled activity replacement. Use the *Technology Schedule* as a tool.

4) **Rules:** agree upon rules that will support the family unplug.

Each family should discuss what type of structure and rules they need to establish to support and complete the *Tech Diet*. Suggestion is that each family acquire a *Tech Box* with lock, and that all technology upon entering the home is locked up. Key or combination for lock should be given to the lowest technology user, generally this would be the youngest child in the family. Penalties for cheating should be agreed upon, as well as technology usage rules when members are outside the family home.

Procedure	Moderate Use	Heavy Use	Very Heavy Use	Severe Use
Rate	3-4 hours/day	5-6 hours/day	7-8 hours/day	greater 8 hours/day
Reset	3-4 week unplug	5-6 week unplug	7-8 week unplug	3 month unplug
Reorder	Pursue 3-4 activities	Pursue 5-6 activities	Pursue 7-8 activities	Pursue 10 activities
Rules	Lock up all tech in box, locked cupboard, or filing cabinet; leave cell phone at work.	Store all tech out of home at friends/family; leave cell phone at work; acquire non-texting phone for emergencies.	Sell all handheld devices e.g. cell phones, tablets, and video gaming platforms; switch to non-internet phone.	Destroy all handheld devices e.g. cell phones, tablets, and video gaming platforms; revert to land lines for phone.

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