Technology Toolbox

A great deal of time is spent talking about the negative aspects of technology and all the technologies you should avoid because it is unhealthy. However, there are some amazing technological resources available that can enhance your life and be highly therapeutic. Technology is not inherently bad, and if you are going to live in today's world, you will need to equip your technology toolbox with resources that will be healthy and helpful to you. This exercise is designed to introduce you to some of these resources, and encourage you to use technology as part of your recovery.

Remember that if you are on community supervision you most likely have restrictions regarding your technology use. Before you check out any of the following suggestions you will need to talk with both your therapist and your probation officer to ensure they feel like it would be appropriate and healthy for your treatment plan.

Webpages

Webpages are one of the most common technologies, and while sexuality and sexual content is abundant on websites, they can also be a wealth of information and support. First, consider blocking and/or monitoring software that can be useful in making the webpages safe to visit. Use blocking software that is commercially available (e.g., NetNanny, K9 Web Protection, etc.) to prevent accidental sites from popping up on your computer. You might also consider monitoring software (e.g., xxxchurch, Covenanteyes, etc.). Remember to look for products that can work both on your computer, as well as tablets and cell phones. If you are not already under restrictions or monitoring, use the Technology Health Plan exercise to plan areas that are safe/unsafe for you to visit.

As you find various websites that are safe and helpful to you, be sure to bookmark/favorite them. Develop a system to organize them so they can be at your fingertips when needed the most. There are also cloud-based bookmark services (e.g., delicious, google bookmarks, etc.) that allow you to access the resources you find from any device (e.g., work computer, tablet, cell phone, etc.).

Here are just a few examples of webpages that can be helpful for those who struggle with their technology behaviors:

http://www.croga.org – self-help page for those who view or have viewed child pornography

http://www.virped.org – virtuous pedophiles for those who have attraction to children, but do not wish to act on their behavior

http://leftbrainbuddha.com – used to teach the basics of mindfulness

http://www.rickhanson.net – teaching about the science of the brain and how it can be changed

https://myrecovery.com – a resource for meetings, discussions, etc. with a 12-step focus

Podcasts

Podcasts can be an excellent source of information and are often overlooked. The most popular place to find a podcast is by logging in to iTunes (http://itunes.com) and searching for topics of interest. Once downloaded, podcasts can be listened to at the gym, while driving, while walking, etc. A quick search about sexual health, therapy, or recovery can provide a great deal of information that you can listen to on the go. It is also important to remember that leisure time is important in the treatment process. Consider looking at iTunes for music you'd enjoy listening to that might help shift your moods or temptations. The same could be said about audiobooks (http://www.audible.com) and music streaming services (e.g., Pandora, Spotify, etc.).

Educational Resources (TED Talks, Courseara)

Have you always wanted to go back to school, but don't have the time or resources? Take a look at the online collection of courses on Coursera (https://www.coursera.org/). This is a website that has lectures on thousands of topics. Some of the courses are free, others are pay-for-credit. The lectures are provided by professors from all over the world on a variety of topics. Also, don't forget about iTunes University. It includes lectures on many topics and can be accessed through the iTunes app or desktop software. Finally, TED Talks are usually short lectures on specific topics that are interesting, inspirational, and educational (http://www.ted.com/).

Streaming

While places like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Video, and other movie/television streaming services do not always come to mind as recovery resources, they can be. There are a number of informative documentaries, movies, etc. that pertain to various areas of treatment and/or recovery.   Plus, they can help with our leisure time by allowing us to relax either alone or with friends and watch appropriate movies/television shows. One of the most popular video repositories is YouTube (www.youtube.com). YouTube has short clips, movies, etc. that can make you laugh, educate you, or just entertain. So go ahead – watch those cat videos!

Social Media

Social media sometimes gets a bad rap, often because people become too immersed in the technology and allow it to take over their lives. Social media, in moderation, can be a great way to meet new people who share similar interests and hobbies, and stay connected to those who can provide support and feedback as needed. Places like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter can all be useful in treatment if used appropriately. You will need the guidance of your therapist, your probation officer, and your support network to determine which aspects of social media may be appropriate for you.

Blogs

Reading other people's blogs/journals about overcoming their challenges – addictive behaviors, mental health issues, incarceration, etc., can be motivating and inspirational. In addition, many professionals provide blogs that give you access to the latest information on a variety of topics.

You may also want to consider starting your own public or private blog. Many client's keep a personal journal of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The electronic world provides an easy way to do this. There are photo blogs, video blogs (vlogs), typed blogs, and combinations of all of these. One of the most common blog spaces is at http://www.blogger.com Once logged in, you can search other people's blogs for inspiration, or start your own blog.

Online Chatting

Chat areas should never be a replacement for real life relationships, but they can enhance your social network and support. In chat rooms, people are often online any time of day or night. No longer do you have the excuse that you work night shift, or you can't find a recovery meeting in your area. Online chat rooms can provide a venue for you to meet others and get/give support to those who may be in a similar situation. A few examples of recovery chat rooms are listed below. You may notice that these are addiction recovery oriented, but they can still be helpful and provide the necessary support.

http://saatalk.info – Sex Addicts Anonymous telemeetings, online meetings, etc.

http://www.recoverize.com – social media site (desktop or mobile) that includes chatting

http://e-aa.org – Alcoholics Anonymous online chatting

Recovery Apps

Devices that run iOS and Droid operating systems rely on apps to operate. Apps are small software programs designed for a single purpose (e.g., a game, productivity, shopping, etc.). There are many apps that are designed for self-improvement. Below are some examples to get you started, but with guidance and supervision, you may want to search for others.

- iRecovery – earn points for positive recovery related activities
- Sobergrid – geolocation app to find others in the area in recovery – connect / rides
- Insight Timer – timer with calming tone to signal time for meditation / prayer
- ODAT – daily reading app delivered as a text / email / notification
- Sobertool – focused on relapse prevention and specific readings / tasks
- Recoverize – community discussion board

Evaluating Resources

Regardless of the technological resources you find, remember that just because it is online, does not mean it's true. Nothing can replace common sense and conversations with others about things you find on technology. Here are some tips for evaluating resources you may find:

- Check the date it was posted. Things change quickly and you want current information.

- Look for the source of the information. Is it provided by the government, a non-profit, or a single individual?

- Look for the funding source behind the technology. Is there an ulterior motive?

- If the page is posted by an individual, it may be useful, but may not be accurate.

- Bottom line, read everything you find on various technologies with a critical eye.

Summary

Although it has been mentioned several times, please be sure you talk with your therapist, probation officer, and support group about your use of technology. It can be a slippery slope when you start exploring technology. If you find yourself doing things online that no one knows about and/or if you are keeping secrets about your technology use – these are signals that you are in trouble with your technology use! While it can be difficult, you should reach out to your support system (e.g., therapist, sponsor, accountability partner, etc.) and let them know you need their guidance, support, and help.

"Food for thought"

1. How do you feel about exploring technology as a therapeutic tool in your treatment?

2. What could you imagine would be problematic for you when exploring healthy and appropriate technology?

3. Is there a specific venue that you should avoid when exploring healthy areas of technology? For example, if your offense involved chat areas, would it be a good idea for you to avoid any type of chat area? If so, why or why not?

4. Can you outline a plan that would make this less risky for you? For example, exploring these areas of technology with your therapist or support person?

5. What is your plan if you begin to have difficulty while exploring these healthy and appropriate technology areas? Can you name the people you would use as part of your plan?

6. Are you clear about the consequences if you would start doing inappropriate things online?