Looking around at the world today, we are arguably the most connected we have ever been. Who would have ever imagined that we could simply open a screen and almost instantly chat with someone halfway around the world? This leads to vast opportunities for growth, as well as stagnation.

      Stagnation is a shocking idea when the world is now moving at lightning speed, but think about this: How many times a day are tasks dropped to jump to the ring of the phone or the tone of a text. It is a conditioned response that since we are so "connected" that we have to be at everyone's immediate disposal, regardless of what else was happening in that moment.

                 There is also the growing fascination with gaming. There are people who can spend hours sitting in front of the TV or computer screen, never moving, all because of the virtual world they are partaking in.

             And let us not forget another growing distractor, Social Media. Today there are so many social networking sites available, and even more being invented, that it is dizzying to try and keep up with them all.

              Now, there are many reasons people turn to these activities. It could be a coping mechanism for what is going on in life. A stress release. These means are utilized for productivity for others.

                    So when does technology become more harmful then helpful? Technology can become troublesome if that is the only interaction that an individual has. This is a way of education and productivity for some, but if it’s the only source of interaction with others than social skills may suffer.  It becomes a problem when other activities are neglected. For example, not completing/attending to work (house, school, or job), canceling plans with others, not spending quality time with others, or all thoughts and actions lead back to technology all so time can be spent on technology. In other words, the whole world seen is technology. Technology is now the most important component of the day. These signs are of over use and obsessive use.

              There is also the issue of  connection. We are more accessible but does this mean that we are closer? The technology is developing quickly, but nothing has been created to replicate in person interactions. Although we can connect verbally with people, an interpersonal connection is not created. For example, body language can be seen on video chats, but personal space can not. And in text forms of communication there are many elements lost, such as tone of voice or body language. It is important to structure time in for people to interaction with people. These communication skills, as briefly mentioned above, can only be learned through practice. Here are a few ideas of how to integrate these learning experiences in everyday life.

             Limit time spent on any virtual means:

* + - Have time where the phone is off, the games are shut down, and the social media isn't being refreshed to spend time with family members and/or friends. Have them join in the no technology with you for this short period of the day so that full attention is given to one another. Start out small and work up to longer periods of inaccessibility.
    - Families can utilize dinner time, eating together, a no technology zone.
    - Only check e-mails, social media, text messages, etc. a predetermined number of times daily. (For example, setting out the limit to only check social media after breakfast, lunch, dinner, and shower instead of constantly refreshing the page through out the day.)
    - Some phones have a feature where all notifications will be turned off/silenced except phone calls for a list of people created by you or if a particular person calls more then once in a short period of time.
    - Find fun activities to fill the no technology time. Walk through the park, play mini golf, complete yard work as a family/group/pair, take advantage of free local events, take a class together, or anything that will get people together and talking!

              Why? Why does time on technology need to be limited many ask. It has been found that too much time spent on technology can lead to headaches, insomnia, and "overheating" of the brain because it never has time to shut off/slow down. Dr. Hallowell, in an article found on WebMD, "dubs the F-state- Frantic, Frazzled, Frenzided" in reference to those who feel obligated to respond to emails. He also points out, in the same article, that "If you don't prioritize you'll go in many directions at once and you won't do anything well."

    German neuroscientist [Manfred Spitzer](http://www.worldcrunch.com/tech-science/does-the-internet-make-you-dumb-top-german-neuroscientist-says-yes-and-forever/digital-dementia-manfred-spitzer-neuropsychiatry/c4s9550/#.UoE1al_TkdU) coined the term “Digital Dementia” in 2012 for his observations that overuse of technology can contribute to the breakdown of cognitive abilities. In the article found on alzheimers.net, it goes on to explain how our advanced technology has decreased the use of short term memory. We no longer have to remember phone numbers or any other facts because it is all saved into our phones or calendars or we can simply search the world wide web for the information.  But fear not, there are actions that can be taken to combat these effects.

“According to neurologist Dr. Carolyn Brockington from St. Luke’s Roosevelt Medical Center in New York City, we can do other things simply by ‘exercising our brains.’ For example,

1. **Use Your Head**. Retrieve information from your brain organically – rather than automatically turning to Google to look up that actress you can’t remember immediately. Sit there and concentrate until you can recall it.

2. **Crack Open a Book**. That’s right. Reading an actual book rather than a tablet has been shown to improve memory retention.

3. [**Learn a new language**](http://www.alzheimers.net/2013-11-11/speaking-two-languages-delays-dementia/). Putting you outside your comfort zone helps your brain work harder, which makes you smarter.

4. **Play a new instrument**. Instruments require the use of both side of the brain - like the piano or the guitar, for example, which help strengthen and balance it.

5. **Get physical**. Physical exercise increases blood flow and accelerates the transport of vital nutrients to your brain.”

  So, as demonstrated in this article, there are grand benefits to the use of technology. It just has to be done in balance with other areas. This can be a challenge to tackle but there are resources to help along the way. Family, friends, or professionals. Emma Lee Broady Academy is partnering with a counseling agency to bring affordable services described above to students and/or families. Call the academy at (210)390-1549, Shauna Markowski, MA, LPC-Intern at (210)802-1851 or Becky Swiney, MS, NCC, LPC-Intern  at (210)952-2680 or visit www. [steppingforwardcc.com](http://steppingforwardcc.com/) for more information.

Sources: [www.webmd.com/mental-health/addiction/features/when-technology-addiction-takes-over-your-life?page=1](http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/addiction/features/when-technology-addiction-takes-over-your-life?page=1)

<http://www.alzheimers.net/2013-11-12/overuse-of-technology-can-lead-to-digital-dementia/>