

## PHUBBING – A SERIOUS THREAT TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP OR JUST A PART OF MODERN LIFE?

Our relationships with phones are A Thing now, a normal facet of 21st century living. For almost all of us, the smartphone has changed our lives. This includes the way we access information and maybe, above everything else, the way we now interact and communicate with those around us.

But (and it is quite a big but) it can also have a really detrimental affect on close relationships.

The word **‘Phubbing’** has been around for years. It’s a combination of Snubbing and Phone and it highlights the choice of favouring the phone rather than the other or others with whom we could be communicating

Surveys show that older adults and women are likely to be more sensitive to feeling most affected. Maybe that’s because sadly in our society these are often the groups most easily ignored or passed over in other walks of life too.

Larking about on the phone may seem totally harmless, but the impacts go more deeply than are usually recognised.

The unacknowledged result is that this habit threatens 4 of our imperative needs:

- Belongingness
- Self Esteem
- Meaningful Existence
- Control

To many people maybe this seems a trifle over dramatic, but in relationship therapy we are often dealing with breakdowns in communication and how this has eroded the closeness between a couple.

There is often a sense that instead of feeling wanted, needed and desired by a partner – a distance starts to creep into the mix, bringing the realisation that the other is prioritising something else over you.

Life will throw many of these challenges at couples. Children, demanding jobs, family obligations, intrusive hobbies .... There are a lot of distractions and obstacles to closeness in everyday life and feeling ignored is often the first step to seeking validation elsewhere.

At its most acute this can even be the precursor to an affair, but often it just drives both people to focus more on the outside elements that give them the yearned for feeling of significance that seems to have melted away and become lost from within their relationship.

Which brings us back to the phone. Such a small and seemingly unimportant thing, it can actually make another feel shunned and cold-shouldered.

Appearing to be ostracised in favour of something or someone else is likely to lead to feelings of hurt and even betrayal. And it's a tough call to feel as if one is constantly fighting to get attention, especially when the rival is just a little piece of plastic.

Surveys show that high levels of Phubbing correlate with lower levels of couple satisfaction.

So it's important to start a conversation and let the other know how you feel about this dilemma. With the ability to talk, and also importantly to really listen, you are both able to work on some solutions.

Cut yourselves a bit of slack here, as techies in Silicon Valley and beyond have specifically designed smartphones to activate our brains and create a loop of habitual and addictive behaviours. This is carefully organised to keep us scrolling and even to make us fearful of losing or forgetting our phone to the extent of creating a real dependency.

Creative solutions will focus on restructuring ingrained times and habits.

**In The Bedroom** I always urge clients to leave phones out of their bedrooms. Or at least out of reach of the bed and definitely with all notifications switched off overnight.

The aim is to have no phone activity for at least an hour before sleep and never let your phone be the first and last connection of the day.

Always greet a partner before engaging with a gadget.

**At Mealtimes** unless there's a vital reason, eating and scrolling are just bad manners. I read somewhere that Mick Jagger asks everyone round the table to place their phones in a big bowl before a meal. This may be a complete fantasy but I like the picture it paints. I always see the bowl as a huge exquisite item of antique polished wood.

**While Watching TV Together** this comes up often in sessions. One person thinks that just sitting together is companionable enough, the other feels that the eyes lowering down to a phone is excluding any closeness. Actually, it's really just as if there's another person in the room taking the attention away from the shared experience and leads to painful feelings in the other of being ignored and unimportant.

**While Walking** I'm a great believer in walking and talking, of being outside together and not having to look at each other, yet understanding the shared connection, is a really safe and easy way to air feelings which can sometimes escalate in a domestic setting. Being interrupted just pushes the couple apart and makes the experience disappointing and frustrating. Decide that your partner takes precedence and maybe even leave the cherished phone at home

**During sex** unless this is a mutually agreed part of your physical relationship It's just a great big NO.

Here's the wonderful Lady Gaga to show that even she has phone communication problems...

**<https://youtu.be/1gWNOKMrNLI>**