

# THE HEALING POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS: Building Relationship and Emotional Regulation Skills in a Selfie Society

Jennifer Morgan Smith, LMFT, Provo Canyon School  
AJ Frithiof, LCSW, New Vision Wilderness

## INTRODUCTION

Society's evolution towards social media, technology, and egocentricity are negatively impacting our clients and our staff members on individual and familial levels. While social media and technology are the new "way of the world," they are negatively affecting our employees' ability to empathize, connect, and relate to clients. Without these skills, employees are unable to meet our clients' needs for connection adequately, which leaves clients feeling further isolated and hurting, employees feeling incompetent and overwhelmed, and employers feeling frustrated and at a loss at their inability to retain staff.

Below is data about society's technology, social media, and ego-centric perspective have evolved and are impacting individuals and families.

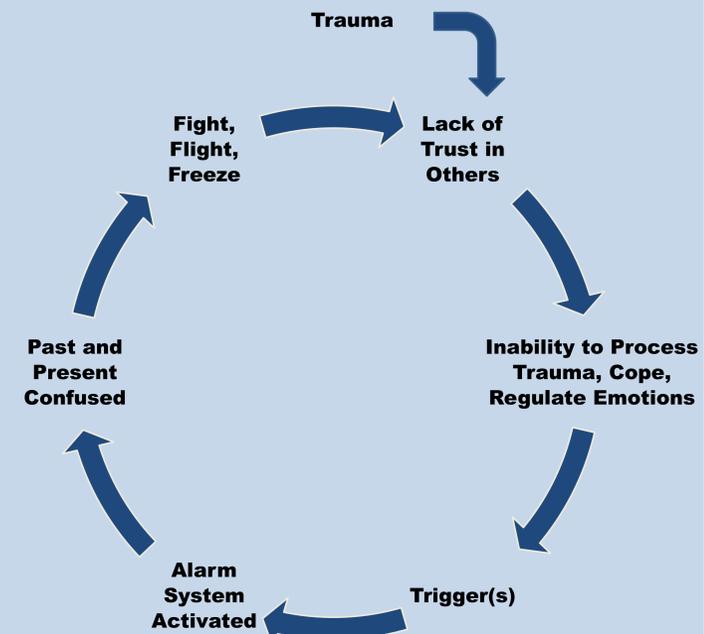
**"In the absence of love and belonging, there will always be suffering." Brene Brown**

## SOCIETAL, INDIVIDUAL, AND FAMILY PROBLEMS

- The average size of new homes has increased 1000 square feet since 1973.
- On average, there are more TVs in the home than people.
- The current outstanding consumer debt in the United States is \$13.86 trillion
- 90% of U.S. households have three or more Internet-connected devices, and Americans devote > 10 hours per day on screen time.
- 51% of respondents said they check social network sites at dinner.
- The average person checks their cell phone 110 times a day (an average of 9x/hour)
- Almost two in five people spend more time socializing online than they do face-to-face
- 24% of people missed important moments in real life because they were trying to share them on social channels
- A national survey found that 62% of school age kids said that their parents are too distracted when they try to talk to them. Cell phones is the top parent distraction.
- The more time teens spend looking at screens, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression.
- Teens that spend 3 hours a day or more on electronic devices are 35% more likely to have a risk factor for suicide, such as making a suicide plan.
- 1 in 5 people report having checked their phones during sex.
- Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on non-screen activities are more likely to be happy.
- Smart phones and social media are the new drug of choice in homes. They hooked parents, disconnected them from their kids, distracted us from who is truly important, and taught us that "likes" = self worth--and now our kids are modeling us. Kids need our eyes and our love and validation more than ever before. Showing your kids you love them is 2% effort and 98% just putting down your phone.
- There are several studies looking at the link between social media and anxiety
- One study investigated social media use, sleep, and mental health in over 400 Scottish adolescents revealed that those who used social media the most, particularly at night-time, had lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression.
- Another investigation surveyed more than 1,700 young U.S. adults. The researchers compared the number of social platforms used with levels of anxiety and depression. People who frequented higher numbers of social platforms reported higher levels of depression and anxiety. Another study on 18-22-year-olds came to similar conclusions.
- Anxiety existed before Instagram, but the round the clock responding to texts, posting to social media, obsessively following the filtered exploits of peers contribute to the increase in anxiety.
- Users of virtual communication technologies report feeling overwhelmed, anxious, inefficient, and FEARFUL of MISSING OUT on important information.
- Jean Twenge – Since 2011 the trend lines of phone usage and the increase in depression are increasing at the same rate.
- The American Psychiatric Association ran a poll on 1,000 U.S. residents in 2017, and they found that nearly 2/3 were "extremely or somewhat anxious about health and safety for themselves and their families and more than a third are more anxious overall than last year."

## CLIENT PROBLEMS

**Trauma history – frequently in fight, flight, freeze**  
**Mental health diagnoses**  
**Emotional illiteracy**  
**Inability/lack of skills to connect with others**  
**Don't know how to empathize with others**  
**Feel shame**  
**Emotion dysregulation**  
**Unhealthy coping skills – technology, social media, substance use, etc.**  
**Unhealthy, unsupportive, or absent family system**



## STAFF PROBLEMS

**Under-trained and unprepared for potential situations with clients**  
**Vicarious traumatization**  
**Emotional illiteracy**  
**Inability/lack of skills to connect with others**  
**Don't know how to empathize with others**  
**Feel shame**  
**Emotion dysregulation**  
**Unhealthy coping skills – technology, social media, substance use, etc.**  
**Poor listening skills**  
**Poor role modeling in unhealthy family system**  
**Mental health diagnoses**  
**Trauma history**  
**Rigid or loose boundaries**  
**Unrealistic expectations**



## COMMON SOLUTIONS

1. Teach Coping and Emotional Regulation Skills
2. Conduct Debriefings
3. Staff Support
4. Breaks, Rotation schedule
5. Encourage self care
6. Staff training
7. Develop Relationship Skills
8. Empathy development

## CONCLUSION

1. In order to maximize the effectiveness of assessment, programs should invest in using the appropriate measurement methods. programs should utilize methods based on the desired change, environment, people and existing culture
2. Instituting supervision with assessment enhances its effectiveness and leads to quicker more dramatic change.
3. Business should avoid using supervision alone as a method for changing culture or addressing areas in need of correction.
4. Creating a business environment with open and honest communication should be a goal for programs interested in improvement. Environments where employees are encouraged to actively identify personal and business problems/challenges enhances investment and strengthens the culture and climate of the business.

**"The brain is a social organ and requires affectionate contact to develop normally."**  
**Bruce Perry**