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Therapy emphasizing families, couples & individuals
A Window of Hope...A World of Opportunity

Topic: Digital Mischief

Summer, 2010

The computer and the Internet have transformed our lives in a way that most of us take for granted. Most often it has enhanced our lives. However, there are times when this versatile technology has affected us adversely and it is at these times this amazing technology becomes harmful to our thoughts, behaviors and even our relationship with others. When this happens, the goodness of this technology fades and problems begin to occur.

This is not an isolated problem. The statistics are starting and indeed, the Internet and cell phones, especially texting, are affecting the lives of couples so often that in almost every case, the Internet or a cell phone plays a part in facilitating the problems the couples I see have whether it be viewing pornography on the Internet or fighting through text messages.

The problem also affects our children who are exposed to pornography at younger ages, and “sexting” is attracting more and more adolescents who send nude and suggestive photographs to friends via their cell phones, some of which may be published on the Internet. Not only is this disturbing; it is also against the law and teens are being arrested for publishing child pornography, which means they must register as sex offenders.

All of this is alarming, but what are we to do? How do we respond in such a way that we and our families still have access to the benefits of digital wizardry but at the same time limit abuse of this technology? In this issue we will explore some of these issues and offer some practical advice when a family or couples encounter digital mischief that affects their mental well-being.

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Dr. Anderson wrote his doctoral dissertation on the effect computer culture has upon ethics and was one of the first to define how ethical behavior is understood within a systems view of the world, a view that computer development presupposes. As such, he has done a great deal of research and writing upon the way that computers and computerized technology impacts not only the social structures (systems) in which we live, but the way system thought affects our understanding of our sense of self and how agential responsibility is understood in that context. His research and writing now extends to the mental well-being of families, couples and individuals living in a digital culture. In all of this, he says, we need something that grounds our ethical responsibility amidst the flux of systemic chaos. That ground, he writes following the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, is not systemic, but is the face of the other. The other is the one who out of their difference says to us and the world, “You have no right to destroy me” thereby defining the ground of ethical responsibility.

FAQs on digital Mischief

The frightening fact of the matter is that what we are calling “digital mischief” is all too common with sometimes terrifying results. Here’s some FAQs you might want to know.

- Pornography was one of the first industries to utilize the Internet. Now, \$3,075 is spent every second on pornography and every second 28,258 Internet users view porn.
- With an estimated 24 million children now online, one out of five have been solicited for sex in the last year.
- One in four children were sent pictures of people who were naked or having sex.
- One in five U.S. teenagers who regularly log on to the Internet say they have received an unwanted sexual

solicitation via the Web. Solicitations were defined as requests to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk, or to give personal sexual information.

- Only 17 percent of youth and 11 percent of parents could name a specific authority, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), CyberTipline, or an Internet service provider, to which they could report an Internet crime.
- Only 1/3 of the households with Internet access are proactively protecting their children!
- An average Internet user will spend 6 hours and 9 minutes each month on social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, etc.
- People spend twice as much time online than they do watching television.
- During business hours:
 - 30-40% of the time it is not for business use.
 - 60% of all online purchases are made at work.
 - 70% of all Internet pornography accessed is during the 9-5 workday.
 - A 40% loss in productivity is attributed to “cyber-slacking.”
 - Men are twice as likely to surf the Net for enjoyment while at work.

Just a Machine...?



So what's the big deal? It's just a machine, right? If you read popular rants about computerized machines, you might think

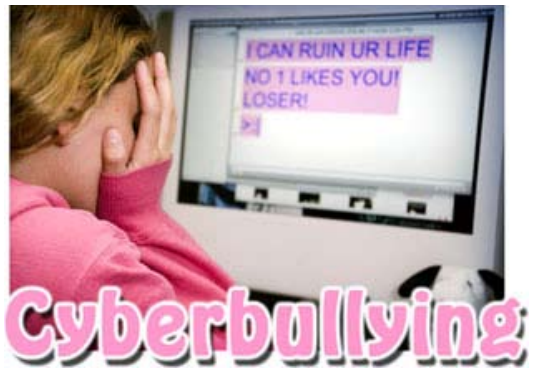
they were born out of the darker side of human imagination, yet computers have transformed our world and made much of what we do easier. Still, with the advent of new technology, there are challenges to how we adapt to the impact of this new technology, and as with the advent of other new technologies, there are always those who want to abuse it. Unlike other types of technology, however, computers are distinguished in that they seem to “think” and their function easily interfaces with the function of being human. So, sociologists, ethicists and philosophers are busy figuring out just how exactly computers have impacted our life, what is good and bad about their affect and how this new technology successfully enhances or detracts from what it means to be human.

Marshall McLuhan was one of the first to draw the attention of popular culture to the role that electronic technology plays with the statement “The medium is the message.” With this phrase and his work in the area of electronic communication, McLuhan challenged the idea that electronic medium—telephones, radio, TV, and computers—are not just machines. Rather, they change the way that human beings exist in the world, the way that they think about themselves and the way they relate to each other. Contrary to popular opinion at the time, McLuhan was not wildly optimistic about the way this technology touched our lives, and argued that we need to get past thinking that these medium are just machines so we can appreciate and understand how electronic medium is changing human beings and their social structures.

Actually, McLuhan was not the first to take notice of electronic technology and impact that it has upon being human. Martin Heidegger wrote an article on technology in the early 1930s that suggested basically the same thing as McLuhan. According to Heidegger, human

beings are technological beings so to think that technologies such as computers are “just machines” betrays a fundamental aspect of our very nature. It makes it seem as if we could get along without technology although human beings, because of their frailty, have never been able to do so. Human beings overcome the brawn of nature with the advancement of thought and technology is an inevitable product of that process. Therefore technology is inextricably a part of human beings and their way of existing in the world affecting not only the way we do business, but the way we relate to each other.

All of this means that a computer and related technology is not simply a machine. This technology is inextricably intertwined with our being, which means that it will affect the way we think; it will influence the way that family members relate to each other; it will have an impact upon a couples' relationship; and it will become so invisible that we will not give much thought to how the medium becomes the message. It will affect us and our relationship to others and we will not be aware of how it is doing so until it has a negative impact upon our lives. In this newsletter, we will examine this affect and look into the way that “digital mischief” is affecting the mental well-being of families, couples and individuals.



“Cyberbullying involves sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet (e.g., instant messaging, emails, chat rooms, and social networking sites) or other digital communication devices, such as cell phones. It can involve stalking, threats, harassment, impersonalization, humiliation, trickery, and exclusion” (“Cyberbullying,” Educational Digest, 2009). Because

Continued p. 8, “Cyberbully”

Note: This article is not in reference to sexual perpetrators who haunt the Net, but to family members and partners in committed relationships.

What is Internet Addiction or as some call it, pathological Internet use? Is Internet addiction, along with its subsidiary forms (online marital infidelity, cybersex, net compulsions, computer games and information overload) a disorder similar to alcoholism? Even though the term “Internet addiction” is often used by researchers concerned with problems associated with the Internet—both within and outside of academia—Internet addiction is controversial at best. Psychiatrist and research fellow at King’s College London, Vaughan Bell and Elias Aboujaoude of Stanford University tend to disagree (Roger Collier, “Internet Addiction New-Age Diagnosis or Symptom of Age-Old Problem? Canadian Medical Association Journal, 2009). There is no such thing as Internet addiction, they contend. Rather, certain personality disorders are attracted to this type of communication medium and for those reasons obsess on what the Internet has to offer. The Internet, says Bell, is not an activity, but is a communication medium that reshapes human life by exacerbating existing disorders. However, overzealous use of the Internet has created problems in relationships and has challenged the family structure and the committed relationships of adults spanning the age continuum. What is it about the Internet that inspires promises of better worlds while at the same time threatening the very fabric of families, the committed relationships of couples and the ability of children, youth and adults to concentrate on what they are doing and see projects—whether at school, work or at home—through to completion?

It is impossible in the space allotted to answer these questions. However, based upon my research and my practice, one thing is certain. In almost every family and couples crisis I deal with, some form of what I call “digital mischief” is involved. Whether it is infidelity because of cybersex, or affairs stemming from e-mail and/or chat rooms, the Internet is introducing issues within committed relationships that undermines trust and makes it more difficult to forgive. In families, issues such as sexting, texting and cyberbullying are invading the security once defined by the family unit and can cause all types of anxiety disorders, depression and other



mood disorders that disrupt the sanctity of the family and can even lead to suicidal ideation. Whether a disorder or a medium of communication that exacerbates dysfunctionality in couples and families, the phenomena that swirls around the digital world of the Internet is causing increasing concern about the safety of our children, our spouses and ourselves. In what is to follow, I wish to take a moment to explain what I think is going on and how we might address these problems.

To suggest that Internet addiction is a real phenomenon lacks scientific verification and seems to beg too many questions. So, I prefer the term “digital mischief.” To act as if there is no deviant behavior in the digital world of the World Wide Web is to live in denial. However, it is all too easy to rationalize these behaviors based upon existing conditions, or blithely act as if there are no real problems because after all, human greed and debauchery will always find ways of exploiting new technology. However, as I noted in “Just a Machine...?” (p. 5), many of these rationalizations are based upon an instrumental attitude about digital technology. Indeed, those for whom the Internet is an invitation to digital mischief often deny there is a problem because “they claim they cannot be addicted to a machine” (Diane Wieland, “Computer Addiction: Implications of Nursing Psychotherapy Practice, Perspectives in Psychiatric

Continued on p. 6, “Digital Mischief”

Did you hear a loud cheer on July 13 around 11:00 a.m.?

Well if you did, that was Harold cheering because he learned he had passed the national Marriage and Family Therapy Exam. What a relief; what an exciting moment. Pass the exam means that Harold is now a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) – a goal he has been working on for more than five years. Yipee! Harold persevered and attained his goal. He is now an LMFT!

What does this mean for you?

You will receive the same quality care, but there are other perks that having an LMFT brings with it. For starters, Harold will work to be included on insurance panels, which means that he will soon be able to accept insurance. This will help your pocketbook and allow more people to take advantage of the therapy services that Harold W. Anderson LLC has to offer.



This is a good day...Yipee!



Grounding our humanity in power favors men who embrace the Internet and computerized technology motivated by power, status and dominance, while disadvantaging women whose digital embodiment is marked by a need for support, friendship, romance and venting about their

“Digital Mischief” (Cont. from p. 4)

Care, 2005). In other words, as long as we think of the digital world as “just a machine,” we will be duped into thinking that there are no real problems, or that somehow the problems we experience are simply new variants of old problems and with this, the fear is that we lack insight needed to adequately address digital mischief.

Web consultant, writer Linda Stone rejects much of the alarmist tendencies forwarded by the prognosticators of digital doom. She contends that since the advent of digital medium, human beings have been in a state of transition, which creates a condition of “continuous partial attention (CPA)” (quoted in Chris Edwards, “Turn On, Tune Out,” *Engineer & Technology*, 2008). Somewhat akin to Attention Deficit Disorder, CPA is a result of informational overload, and requires that human beings learn how to filter digital information so that they can concentrate upon one thing and not be distracted by the myriad of informational bits the Internet places before us. Stone believes this will happen by 2014.

In a general way, I tend to agree with Stone. The advent of digital technology is a different part of human evolution and requires a series of adjustments if we are to adapt to our new informational embodiment successfully (Anderson, *Digital Ontology* and

the Problem of Ethics: A Levinasian Response, 1999). Implied in this transition is not only a way of being, but it also means that we must reconsider the different systemic realities that have defined human existence—the family, marriage, the self, and ethical responsibility—if we are to maintain our humanity in the age of the digit. Put differently, digital mischief is a sign of dysfunctional adaptation to the move from more passive forms of technology to a digital technology that appears as if it “communicates back” (Collier, “2009).

The role of the family and marriage therapist, then, is to understand this transitional period so as to help address the structural transformations required to successfully navigate the challenges of digital embodiment, i.e., the way that digital technologies redefine the systemic realities of being human. Required in this structural reassessment is a reconsideration of what grounds our humanity. In a digital world, it is too easy to assume that this ground is defined by power, but as Michel Foucault warns, grounding our humanity in this way privileges those in power while robbing marginalized persons from their right to fully participate in a digital world. Based upon current research, this means that grounding our humanity in power favors men who embrace the Internet and computerized technology motivated by power, status and dominance, while disadvantaging women whose digital embodiment is marked by a need for support, friendship, romance and venting about their partners too obsessed with power (Wieland, 2005).

The marriage and family therapist must bring balance to this inequity by reframing what it means to be human through a radical form of empathy. Following the insights of Emmanuel Levinas, this means that we map our love of each other based upon our empathy for the other person in the relationship. In the digital world, we adjudicate digital mischief only as we open ourselves to responsible interaction established by the face of our partner, which is marked by vulnerability not power, by compromise not dominance, by the willingness to nurture not status. By so redefining the structures of being human, families, couples and family members will be more empowered to embrace that which will build a better digital world and reject that which leads to digital mischief. In the remainder of articles, I will explain how sexting, cyberbullying and Internet sexual mischief can be adequately addressed through a more responsible and empathetic way of living in a digital world.



When a couple is in crisis, I tell them I will not work for one person or the other in the dyad. Rather, my client becomes the relationship itself. What I mean is the issue is not simply a psychopathology

resident in one partner. Rather, the nature of the relationship leads the couple into the crisis. When the affairs within a relationship, I do not excuse the inappropriate behavior, but instead seek to define the structural flaws that encouraged betrayal. If these flaws can be addressed and corrected, then the chances of repeating infidelity is reduced considerably.

Certainly, there are extremely important subsidiary issues such as trust and what Janis Abrahms Spring calls “genuine forgiveness” (How Can I Forgive You?, 2004), but in this article I will concentrate on the systemic issues of betrayal and apply these to what is all too often called “Internet Sexual Addiction.” Much of the time, while the behavior may seem addictive, the issue is not the psychopathology of one dyad member, but is systemic and the intervention is only affective on a systemic level.

Following the work of David Schnarch (The Sexual Crucible, 1991), I would contend that the issue is confusion about the meaning of intimacy and the quest for what many believe is the holy grail of sex... orgasm. All too often, a couple’s notion of intimacy is confused with the act of sex, the end of which is defined as orgasm. This confusion hides deeper systemic issues such as boundary formations that because they are poorly defined lead to a weak sense of self, a weakness that makes intimacy very difficult.

The weakness or nonexistence of properly defined boundaries is one of the primary reasons that people—primarily men—retreat to the Internet for their sexual encounters. I am reminded of the cartoon of two dogs on the Internet. The one dog that is on the computer

says to the other, “On the Internet, no one knows you’re a dog.” On the Internet, self-defining boundaries need not apply, and anyone can for a few fleeting moments become whoever they want to be. It is not that the Internet erases their boundaries; it is that the Internet provides an enchanted playground for those whose weak boundary formation is contributing to and caused by the systemic problems within their marriage. They get on the Internet and become a person who in real life they cannot become. The result is prurient behaviors such as masturbating to Internet pornography, cybersex, or face-to-face affairs, all of which further damage the structure of their marriage relationship... even if their behaviors are never discovered. Because of the fluidity of boundary formations and the fact that these “cyber-relationships” seem to lack any rules, those who seek this form of escape return to it again and again.

The systemic issues that need to be addressed are the role of sex and intimacy within the marriage. Weak or nonexistence boundaries mean that intimacy is defined in terms of other-validation, with the strength of orgasm the ultimate signifier of a partner’s validation. When this does not take place, or if there is a lessening of sexual activity, then the sense of self within the relationship is weakened as well. By addressing the systemic issues of other-validating intimacy, the systemic flaws of the relationship leading to poor boundary formation are addressed resulting in a strengthening of self, and the definition of intimacy based upon something other than other-validation with the result of creating a more meaningful foundation for not only sex, but the very necessary inclusion of romance within the structure of the relationship. With strong boundary formation, more substantial notions of intimacy and sex, and the inclusion of romance within the relationship, the Internet loses much of its prurient appeal and the relationship is strengthened. So, while it sometimes seems that an errant spouse is addicted to the Internet when it comes to prurient activities, this may not be the case. It may be that this is symptomatic of a problem in the structure of the relationship based in dysfunctional notions of intimacy and sex. These problems are not overcome by curing the individual. They are addressed by addressing the nature of the relationship itself.



***E-mail me your thoughts
at hwanderson@q.com***



Sexting is “the act of sending nude or partially nude photos or sexually explicit messages via cell phone text messaging” (Sexting 101, 2010). Sexting is popular among youth and if under 18, sexting under

that may violate child pornography laws. Recent surveys indicate that as many as 1 in 5 youth send either nude or partially nude images of themselves. Those statistics are alarming, but NetSmartz.org provides the following prevention tips:

- **Think about the consequences** of sending or forwarding a sexual picture of someone underage even if it is you. You could get kicked off sports teams, face humiliation, lose educational opportunities, and even get in trouble with the law.

“Cyberbully” (Cont. from p. 3)

of the portability of this media, cyberbullying can take place anywhere and a recent study found that 45% of preteens and 30% of teens are cyberbullied at school.

The effects of cyberbullying can lead to significant emotional harm including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, problems concentrating, poor school performance and may lead to suicidal ideation. If your child is being cyberbullied, or if you know of someone else who is, here are some tips for you:

Tips for Students:

- Do not retaliate because that can escalate harassment.
- Either ignore the message or tell the bully to stop.
- Tell an adult about the cyberbullying.
- Make a hard copy of the posted material.
- Write down how you feel and what you might want to say, but don’t send it to anyone.
- Do not delete email or text messages until an adult has reviewed and documented it.
- Block future communication with the cyberbully.
- Don’t say or do anything online that you wouldn’t do face-to-face.

- **Never take** images of yourself that you wouldn’t want everyone—your classmates, your teachers, your family, or your employers—to see.

- **Before hitting send**, remember that you can’t control where this image may travel. What you send to a boyfriend or girlfriend could easily end up with their friends, and their friends...

- **If you forward** a sexual picture of someone underage, you are as responsible for this image as the original sender. You could face child pornography charges, go to jail, and have to register as a sex offender.

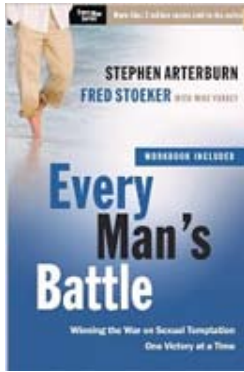
- **Report** any nude pictures you receive on your cell phone to an adult you trust. Do not delete the message. Instead, get your parents or guardians, teachers, and school counselors involved immediately.

Remember, images published on the Internet never go away, even if the original recipient deletes them. They are stored on some server somewhere and can be found.

Tips for parents:

- Keep computers in easily viewable areas.
- Talk regularly with your children about the online activities in which they are involved.
- While respecting their privacy, tell your children you are going to review their online communication.
- Set clear expectations for responsible online behavior and phone use.
- Be ware of warning signs that may indicate your child is being bullied (e.g., reluctant use of computer, a change in behavior and mood, reluctance to go to school, etc.).
- Also be alert to the possibility of your child being a cyberbully.
- Document any bullying.
- Contact the school and enlist the help of school counselors or other mental health professionals.
- File a complaint with the website, ISP, or cell phone company.
- Contact the police if the bullying includes threats.

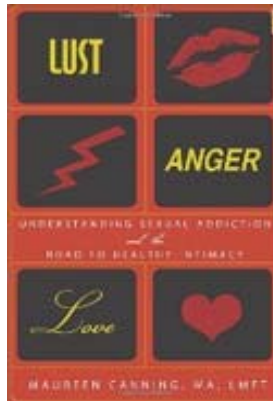
Cyberbullying is a serious threat to our children’s well-being. Take it seriously and do all you can to stop it.



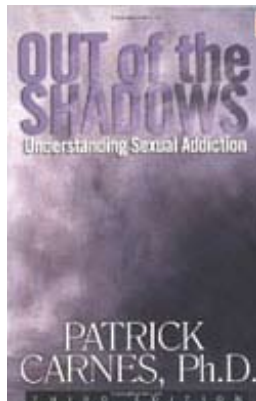
Written by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker and others, this is a personal account of men wrestling with sexual addiction in a digital age. The stories contained in this work let me know that they can control their sexual impulses even when digital culture seems to tell them otherwise.

In *Lust, Anger, Love: Understanding Sexual Addiction and the Road to Intimacy*, therapist

Maureen Canning explores the roots of her own sexual abuse by her father and applies these insights to her work with others. Sexual abuse and addiction is rooted, she contends, in a deep seated anger incapable of feeling shame. The solution is getting the sexual predator or addict to know their shame and to use this as a motivation to overcoming their abusive and addictive behaviors.

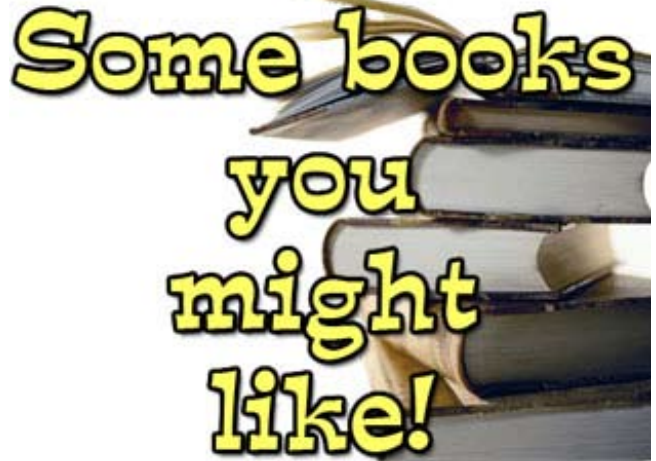
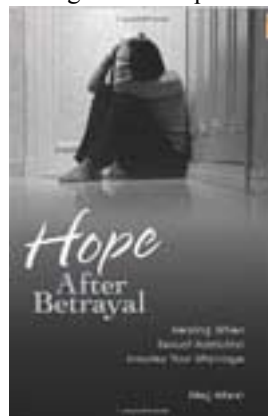


Patrick Carnes book, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (third edition) addresses the issue of cybersex addiction by identifying danger signs, explaining the dynamics, and describing the consequences of of sexual addiction and dependency.

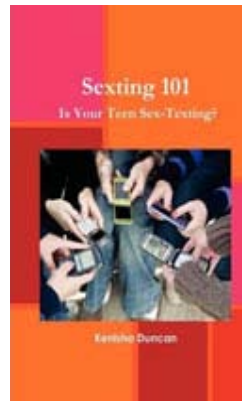


With practical advice, it points the way out of the shadows of sexual compulsion back to the light of life's fullness.

Meg Wilson's book, *Hope*



after *Betrayal: Healing When Sexual Addiction Invades Your Marriage*, explores the hurt and betrayal women feel when sexually compulsive behaviors invade their marriage. The author relies upon her own story, other examples and Scripture to help women cope and find help in light of their husband's sexual compulsion.



Sexting is the act of sending nude or partially nude photos or sexually explicit messages via cell phones. It is becoming increasingly popular with teens, but if a youth is found guilty of sexting, which is interpreted as child pornography, they will have to register as sex offenders. This book was written to provide greater awareness to parents about sexting.

Cyberbullying has cruel consequences including youth suicide. Nancy Willard provides information on how to prevent and respond to cyberbullying and cyberthreats. It includes detailed guidelines for managing Internet and personal device usage including cell phones. Its appendices also include useful forms for parents and providers.



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Harold brings a wide range of experience to his counseling practice. He has been a pastor for over twenty-five years, has taught philosophy and ethics throughout the front range area, and has spoken and lectured on a wide range of topics including mental health. He has a M.A., M.Div., Ph.D. and has done postgraduate work in family therapy and counseling. Harold received a certificate for Marriage and Family Therapy from the Denver School for Family Therapy and is a licensed Marriage and Family therapist (LMFT).

Harold's training prepares him to work with families and couples, but he also enjoys working with individuals of all ages. Harold is the mental health consultant for Brush and Fort Morgan Head Start and sees clients one day a week in Akron at the Washington County Clinic.

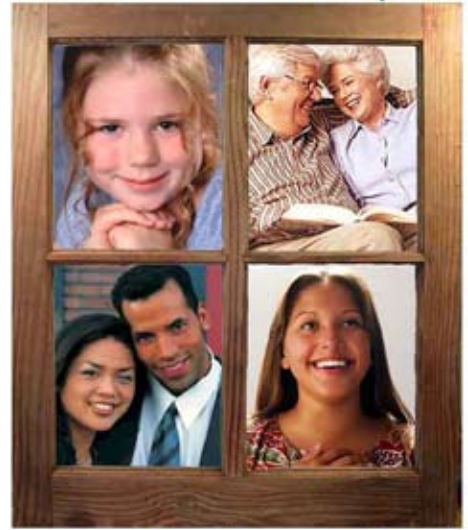
Check out my website at:

www.HaroldAnderson.net. . . a source for mental wellness

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A Window of Hope...



A world of opportunity

In this Issue: The Internet, cell phones and other forms of technology are often a blessing, but they are also creating serious threats to family, couple and individual mental health. Find out why.