

The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter

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Electronic Infidelity

I remember first hearing about the concept of e-mail in 1992 when I was a freshman at Georgia Tech. Our professors would list their e-mail addresses in the syllabus and let us know that we could “e-mail” them if we had any questions. I soon realized that as a student I was assigned my own e-mail address within the school intranet. I was reluctant to use e-mail at first, but my comfort level increased over time and I began to find it to be a valuable resource. Then, as the technology advanced, I began to use e-mail not just within the campus *intranet* but with the rest of the world through the *internet*. By the time I graduated (5 not so short years later) e-mail was second nature to me. Over the last 10 years or so, electronic communication has exploded and now includes many varieties such as instant messaging, chat, and mobile phone texting. No longer a luxury, electronic communication is now widely considered a necessity.

But, as with any new or emerging technology, there are drawbacks and pitfalls to instantaneous electronic communication. I have seen many clients that initially sought out counseling because they were involved in an affair that started electronically. The danger of electronic infidelity is that it can start off very innocently and catch people off guard. For example, a woman may have a contact with a man at work that she has to communicate with via e-mail for business purposes during the day. This communication might start off as just business related, but in time the woman finds herself mentioning “I am not in a great mood today” or “I am not looking forward to going home tonight.” These statements will inevitably lead the receiver of the e-mail to ask “Why?” and an electronic conversation about personal issues ensues. The woman may find that this type of conversation becomes quite frequent and that over time she is sharing intimate details of her life with her male business contact. These electronic conversations, via either e-mail, instant messaging, chat or mobile phone texting, can lead to emotional infidelity. And, quite often, emotional infidelity can lead to physical infidelity.

Electronic infidelity can also occur not so innocently, as people who are involved in fractured marriages or relationships will seek out strangers to communicate with on the internet via either public chat rooms or message boards. This is dangerous on many levels because you absolutely have no clue who you are dealing with when you randomly meet people on the internet. But, people who are not getting their emotional or sexual needs met within their relationship will take both dangerous and drastic measures in an effort to feel connected to another human being.

Below are some preventative measures you can take to help avoid falling into the trap of electronic infidelity:

- Avoid discussing intimate details of your marriage with members of the opposite sex
- If you feel the need to discuss your marital problems, then seek out a licensed counselor to do so
- Avoid engaging in conversation with a member of the opposite sex about *their* relationship problems
- Avoid message boards or chat rooms as a means of meeting your emotional or sexual needs
- Remember that electronic communication leaves behind electronic evidence

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