

Announcer: Effects of Social Media on a Relationship. This is Stay Happily Married, Episode number 294.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married. Your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Scott Blair: I'm Scott Blair and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Is your relationship being affected by social media? The world of social media is growing everyday. It feels like every time a new website or app for your phone comes into existence another one follows right behind it. We now have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, among others that many people use everyday.

It seems that an alarming amount of people communicate more online now than in person. You go to a restaurant and you could look around and see the amount of people on their phones instead of communicating with the person right in front of them. Can the use of social media harm your relationship? What can we do to save our relationships in this situation?

Earning his master's in Marriage and Family Therapy from Trevecca Nazarene University, Mr. Jessee Eppley is a therapist at Healing Solutions Counseling Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mr. Eppley is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapy Associate. He has extensive experience working with emotionally focused therapy which emphasizes encouraging individuals and couples to move from stuck relationships and patterns of life into a fuller experience of health. Using this model, people move from tension and disconnect towards a deeper experience of intimacy. Welcome to the show Jessee. I'm so glad that you could join us today.

Jessee Eppley: Oh, Scott, I'm excited to be here. Thanks for having me on.

Scott Blair: Well, almost everyone I know, I can't think of anyone, even my mother has at least one type of social media site that they frequent and use whether it's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or a plethora of others that we all use. What problems do you see that these are causing for relationships today?

Jessee Eppley: That's a great question. First let me say, I'm a big fan of social media myself. I use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, all the time. However, there's been a growing amount of research showing some negative effects it's having on our society. A third of divorces in our country are naming Facebook somewhere in the proceedings right now. That's up 20% over the last three years.

There's also been a rise of Facebook being mentioned in custody battles. Beyond that, I'm seeing more and more clients come to my office sharing story after story of a spouse, a husband, a wife, connecting with an old love or a new interest on Facebook, and keeping it secret from their spouses. People are turning away from their marriages and turning to the world of social media in the hopes of fulfilling what they think is missing in the relationship.

On less dramatic notes, but still significant, couples are beginning to spend more and more time communicating with others online and less time with each other.

Scott Blair: Well, what problems do you see that couples experience in the relationship when they start using social media like this?

Jessee Eppley: Well, the truth is we all want to connect with other people. That's a draw of these sites. Social Media has only given us new vehicles to define and display who we are, it has given us opportunities to connect with others that are like us. This isn't a bad thing. Who hasn't posted a funny quote or picture of a kid, or pets, then wait pensively for the floods of likes or hearts to come in. It makes sense.

The problem that many marriages are facing though is that spouses are beginning to turn from each other and turn to their online connections to fill their emotional needs. Everything from over sharing with an old friend in the different states to emotional affairs, to infidelity, and can begin with a wandering eye or friend invites.

Scott Blair: And I think one of the things that . . . I hear what you're saying about being able to look up old loves and high school sweethearts and stuff. And I think about my parent's generation and how hard that would have been for them. For them to go look for a high school sweetheart after let's say, 20 years, they would have had to really do some digging to come up with that phone number.

But nowadays, it's really easy because we can just put a name into Facebook and search, and we can tell by the photo typically, usually, that that's that person and so the temptation it's a lot easier.

Jessee Eppley: Oh, and you can Google anyone at this point. It's become so prevalent in our society, so easy to do.

Scott Blair: Yeah. What are some of the short and long term negative effects that you're seeing that this behavior has on a relationship?

Jessee Eppley: In the short term, couples do what they always do. When problems arise around Facebook or social media, they either fight about it, they argue, or they'll set restrictions. A common pattern I'm seeing a lot of is that some small infraction will occur; somebody will be offended by something that happens on Facebook or is posted about them. They'll get hurt and demand that their significant other delete Facebook, unfriend a person, delete a post, whatever. This usually band-aid's on a deeper problem.

Changing access, sharing passwords are helpful steps, but often their effects only lasts until somebody calms down or the offended party is moved on. This doesn't really work.

On long term, this kind of turns into negative cycle for many couples. The pattern will repeat itself. Unchecked, patterns of such infractions on Facebook or social media become toxic for relationships. Well, a small can become a pattern, a deep wound for the offended spouse, a point of resentment for the offending spouse, and often push couples towards infidelity, affairs, and just lots of bad situations.

Scott Blair: Sure. When do you notice or when do you think the point is that couples see that their use of social media is not just a little petty argument, but it's actually hurting the relationship?

Jessee Eppley: One of two places. Either somebody wants to just become fed up with the constant whatever, negative things happening on Facebook or some type of betrayal be discovered and I'm seeing more of that. Somebody will find an instant message conversation or a post or picture of somebody and that's usually when the depth of the problems are usually revealed.

Scott Blair: Now, as I said in the beginning of the show, even my own mother has Facebook. So, in a . . . just about everybody in the country has some type of social media we already stated, but have you observed any trends among couples that have these issues that could be resolved from a change in their social media use?

Jessee Eppley: Yeah. That's the most interesting part to me. This problem crops up for couples of all ages, life situations, whatever. I'm seeing young married couples to couples that have been married 40 years fight... facing these problems. The reality is that any person or situation or anything that draws one partner away from the other when it comes to that emotional connection which is what all this is really about, it needs to be acknowledged and dealt with, and social

media is starting to be that trend, that pattern that's throwing people away.

Scott Blair: Okay. Well, earlier you said that giving your partner your password or deleting a certain person, or even deleting your account are just band-aids and temporary solutions or fixes. So, what would you suggest that a couple do? What is your solution to the problem?

Jessee Eppley: My solution to the problem is real basic. It's just the woman has to be vulnerable and it's the hardest thing for so many couples. It's really easy to be vulnerable with somebody over a keyboard much harder it is to look their spouse in the eye and share that vulnerability. So many of the couples I work with right now, I spend just so much time trying to help them learn to be vulnerable with one another. There really is no greater cure to communication problems to any desperate need of wanting to connect than authentic vulnerability.

Scott Blair: Are there any other items that couples can do to kind of resolve some of these negative issues?

Jessee Eppley: Oh, yeah. No, those band-aids I mentioned can help. Share your passwords, defriend temptations or even defriend the people that are perceived as tempters. If it'll save a marriage, I say unplug, rip the router out of the wall, and start spending time together.

However, as good as the actions may be if they're not done in connection with people being vulnerable with one another, Facebook maybe monitored, Instagram maybe gone, but the emotions, the needs, the resentments that are pushing couples apart, they'll still be there. No amount of unplugging can solve the deep heart problems that exist in many relationships.

Scott Blair: So, the couples that you're seeing and talking to you've got them working on their connection with one another, starting to become more vulnerable with their spouse. When they do this, what are some of the changes that you're seeing in the quality and the interaction of the relationship?

Jessee Eppley: Oh, Scott, that's the best part. That's why I do this type of work with couples. The reality is when couples start actually experiencing vulnerability and turning to one another and sharing emotions and hearts, no amount of Facebook comments, Instagram, or social media can really compare to that. It pales in

comparison and seeing marriages actually revive one . . . revive themselves.

When people get into these patterns, these cycles where they start turning to Facebook or social words to anything and start missing one another, the reality is when they get a taste of what initially drew them back together, it's just beautiful.

Scott Blair: Well, I know that this is probably going to be a highly sought out show on our podcast because like you said how popular social media is today that it's causing a lot of problems. I think you said a third of divorce hearings that's showing up in the paperwork somewhere. So for the listeners who sought this show out and they're having problems with that other than what you've already offered, is there any final parting words of advice you think our listeners should know?

Jessee Eppley: Oh, yeah. I might be repeating myself with this, but social media really isn't a bad thing. Connecting with others and expressing ourselves can be life enriching, it could be a really good thing. I just want to encourage your listeners that if you or your spouse begins to realize that you're spending more time updating your statuses than, you know, are spending life with one another, it's time for a change. A change is that change is very possible.

Scott Blair: Jesse, thank you so much for talking with us and being on the show today.

Jessee Eppley: Awesome, Scott. I enjoyed it.

Scott Blair: To find out more about Mr. Jessee Eppley and his practice, Healing Solutions Counseling Center, you can visit their website at [www.CharlotteTherapy.com](http://www.CharlotteTherapy.com) or call 980-237-3880 for an appointment. Thank you so much for joining us today and I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and previous episodes, visit us at [StayHappilyMarried.com](http://StayHappilyMarried.com). I'm Scott Blair, until next time, stay happily married.

Announcer: Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the web at [StayHappilyMarried.com](http://StayHappilyMarried.com). We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please email us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com) or call us at 919-256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.