


Digital Footprints

Digital Footprints refer to the trails and traces we leave behind as we navigate the world of technology. Just like the real world, when we “step” somewhere, we leave a mark of where we have been. Since there is no instant, visual mark left as we use technology, it is easy to forget that digital footprints are being created.

In addition, the concepts discussed in the “Cyberhex” exercise can influence the decisions we make, the behaviors we engage in online, and ultimately our digital footprint. For example, our online behavior can feel isolating and anonymous. Research has shown that when we experience these feelings we are more likely to take risks and engage in inappropriate or illegal behaviors.

Monitoring your digital footprint going forward will be an important step in your overall technological health. Complete the following exercise to help you better understand your digital footprint.

1. On the pair of footprints below, write your first name on one, and your last name on the other. This signifies that you are taking responsibility for your digital footprint and that you will be accountable for where you “walk” while using technology.
2. Place the name(s) of a trusted friend, family member, sponsor, etc. who knows your current problem with your online sexual behavior in one of the footprints. This person(s) is your accountability partner for your digital footprints. When you step into a negative and/or unhealthy online area, this should be the person in whom you confide your misstep. He/she is also the person who can help prevent problems by asking about your digital behavior, and someone you can confide in about your lapses/relapses while using technology.
3. You are going to color the two big toes on the footprint. On one toe, scribble outside the lines (pretend you are in preschool). While coloring the other big toe, carefully stay within the lines. This represents the difference between when you go outside the boundaries online versus when you honor the boundaries in order to stay safe and healthy while online. On the foot that has the scribbled out toe, list the boundaries that you have crossed in the past when using technology. On the foot that has the neatly colored toe, list those boundaries you think will be important to maintain when you use technology in the future. These may be your own personal boundaries, or the boundaries of others. Honoring boundaries shows respect for yourself and others in the digital world.



4. Write the word “sexual offense” on one of the footprints. Now, you have decided you want to erase that word. Go ahead...try to erase it or scribble it out. Pay attention to the fact that no matter how hard you try, there are still remnants of those words. This is to remind you that whatever you do online is stored somewhere and cannot be erased. There is no such thing as deleting your digital footprint or your behaviors when using technology– so make your choices wisely.

5. On one of the footprints, list various activities/behaviors you could do with technology that would support a healthy and safe digital footprint (e.g., listen to music, listen to appropriate podcasts, watch a TED Talk, communicate with others who support you, etc.).

6. The best way to handle your digital footprint is to work on developing a positive reputation for yourself while using technology. You can do this by making healthy choices, staying in “safe” zones (your green zone from the Technology Health Plan), following your boundaries, and not provoking others. Write one or two words on each of your footprint that indicate who you want to be when in the digital world, and then work towards building that reputation through your online decisions and behaviors.

“Food for Thought”

1. What did your past digital footprint say about you?
2. What does your current digital footprint say about you?
3. What do you hope your future digital footprint will say about you?
4. What is your plan for honoring online boundaries?
5. Do you think it would be difficult to tell your therapist and/or accountability person that your digital footprint is in jeopardy? Why or why not?
6. What is your plan for keeping a positive digital footprint in the future?

