

Managing Social Media Stress With Mindfulness

The technique that lets you stay connected with friends while boosting your self-esteem and your self-awareness.

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It's hard to imagine life without **social media**. It has become essential to connecting with our friends, getting updates about what's going on in the world and being entertained. We can barely remember (if we're old enough to remember!) how we stayed in touch without it. But teens and young adults are increasingly reporting that social media can also be a source of **stress**.

What we hear a lot about, **especially from teenagers**, is that when they're scrolling through feeds they are often (consciously or unconsciously) **comparing themselves to others**. People tend to post the highlights — **the perfect hair, the perfect friends, the perfect pre-gym selfie**— and it's fun to scroll through them.

But it can also **hurt your self-esteem** when your life doesn't feel as perfect as everyone else's looks. It can make you start overanalyzing your own social media presence, counting the likes your latest post got and pushing yourself to look effortlessly perfect, too, regardless of how you're really feeling.

Similarly, people are talking so much about the fear of missing out that there's an acronym for it. Social media is FOMO's best and worst friend. If you're worried about missing out, social media is great because you can stay connected to everything, wherever you are. But since there's always something new, you never feel like you've seen everything and you can take a break.

Staying connected

When everything is online you also sometimes get proof that you are, indeed, missing out. When you see your friends hanging out without you, it feels bad. Watching an ex starting a new relationship hurts.

If spending time on social media is causing stress, the [usual advice is to unplug](#). And while that's good advice, it's not very realistic advice, especially for teenagers, who do a huge amount of their socializing online.

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And this adolescent socializing is more important than it looks. Teenagers are still figuring out their place in the world, and it is often through their relationships that they begin to make sense of their identity. It isn't in their interest to stop using social media entirely. But finding a way to have healthy relationships and a healthy self-esteem while still using social media is. Sound tough? Learn how to practice [mindfulness](#).

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a technique for living in the moment and without judgment. It helps you become more aware of what is happening around you and how you feel. Taking the time to slow down and notice these details helps you **regulate your emotions** and stress levels. It also introduces a level of reflection and self-awareness that people often don't have when they're scrolling through feeds online.

And mindfulness isn't just for taking a walk in the park or watching the sunset. If it is applied to the social media experience itself, says Jill Emanuele, PhD, a Child Mind Institute psychologist and mindfulness expert, it can help kids manage the emotion generated by all that information about what your friends are doing.

Dr. Emanuele recommends the following mindfulness strategies to make time spent online (and offline) happier.

Check in with yourself

Work on being more self-aware and prioritizing how you feel and what you think when you're using social media. "The stereotype for using social media is you're just going going going, not really thinking about the impact it's having on you," notes Dr. Emanuele. "You want to try to be mindful of that impact."

Dr. Emanuele recommends asking yourself: How am I doing right now? How is this app making me feel? How did that picture make me feel? Try to be aware of changes in your mood, and see if you notice any patterns.

It's okay if you notice that the **emotions you are having are negative**. Try not to judge how you are feeling, but do acknowledge the emotion. Acknowledging when you are feeling jealous or sad can be very powerful because it actually helps take some of the bite out of the bad feeling. It can also help you process your emotion — without getting carried away by it.

Mindful reality check

However, if something is consistently making you feel bad, practicing mindfulness can also help you identify that and then ask yourself why, and if there is something you can do that might help. Taking the time to notice — and value — how you are feeling is an important skill that will make you happier and more confident in all areas of your life, not just when you're online.

Mindfulness can also give you reality check. For example, people often try to use social media as a way to cheer up when they're feeling down or bored. So if you're feeling bad about yourself, you might post something that's totally opposite, like a cute selfie or a picture of your great friends. Sometimes projecting something different, or getting compliments online, can get you out of the funk.

But the satisfaction is often fleeting, and you can find yourself feeling like you're just fooling everyone. If you notice that you actually feel worse afterwards, know that this isn't uncommon, and look for more reliable ways to improve your mood.

Use technology

Using technology to track technology is another strategy Dr. Emanuele recommends. For example there are apps like Moment and Checky that are designed to help you track how you use your phone.

“Do an experiment to see how much time you actually spend on certain things,” says Dr. Emanuele. “When you're on it, what are you actually doing? What are your emotions like?”

Likewise, mood tracking apps and diaries remind you to take time to check in with yourself. They also create a record of how you've been feeling, which you can revisit after the fact. Gathering data on how you use technology and how

technology affects you will help you notice patterns and, if necessary, develop better habits. Seeing the data might be surprising, since we often aren't aware of how much time we spend once we start scrolling.

If you want [to try to learn more about mindfulness](#), Dr. Emanuele notes there are also apps that guide you through the basics of how to practice mindfulness. Headspace and Smiling Mind are two popular ones. Smiling Mind is designed for young people so it may be a better fit for tweens.

Go offline

The best way to get a little perspective is to take occasional breaks from social media. Do [yoga](#), [go for a run](#), spend time with friends in person, [hang out in nature](#). Whatever it is, doing things in real life can be a big stress reliever and make you feel better about yourself in a way that scrolling through a feed never will.

Try to practice self-awareness during offline activities, too. Notice how you feel in the moment when you are being active, and note what really feels like fun to you. You might surprise yourself. And chances are you'll find that experience is pretty addictive, too.