

MINDFUL MEDIA PRACTICES

From The Jed Foundation and the Child Mind Institute

You probably can't imagine the world without social media. No Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook or any other kind of social app. It's probably even harder to imagine a world with no texting, YouTube or computers. Older adults who didn't grow up with social media often have negative or skeptical opinions about it — but you know that it's a part of life. Social media can be both good and bad. Like any technology, it can be used in helpful ways and in less than helpful ways.

Social media: the good news

Social media makes it possible for people to stay in touch with friends and family in an easy and inexpensive way. It allows groups, no matter their distance, to work on things together. It can help people feel more connected to and supported by others. For some young people who have difficulty connecting to others in person, social media can help with relationship building. There are even opportunities to get mental health support and care online — just be sure the format/platform is reliable and professional.

Social media: the not as good news

While social media can be an excellent platform for people to keep in touch or communicate easily, there are some ways it can become troublesome. The three main areas of trouble are:

- ⦿ **Overuse or over-reliance.** Because personal connections on social media can be brief or may lack depth, depending on social media for social interaction can lead to feelings of isolation
- ⦿ **The anonymity of social media.** This can lead people to say and do things they may not do in a face-to-face interaction
- ⦿ **The internet is permanent.** It's very difficult to remove something once it has been put out into the virtual world.

Compare and despair

When we see what other people are posting online it's easy to make assumptions about someone's entire life. Their life might seem incredibly exciting, social, adventurous, and happy, but do we really know what someone's entire life experience is like by viewing their online posts? Probably not. It's easy to create an exaggerated version of your life in pictures and videos — they are small snippets of the whole story. Some people are good at posting about the good AND the bad in their day to day, but many people focus on sharing only good moments!

What's challenging about looking at all the positive posts is that we can easily find ourselves comparing our own reality to the exciting photos we see online. This false sense of inferiority is common and can lead people to question themselves and feel insecure, anxious, and depressed. Be careful not to compare. You're probably selective about what you put online (posting your best angle or finding the best lighting) but try to remember that others are likely doing the same thing!

Healthy connections

The over-reliance on social media for making connections can get in the way of time spent in real face-to-face conversations and interactions with other people. While staying connected virtually is easy and convenient, it does not have the same intensity and closeness as in-person conversations. Virtual connections don't fully support the social interactions and skills you've learned. Over-reliance on social media for making connections can result in a limited connection to others.

Be positive online

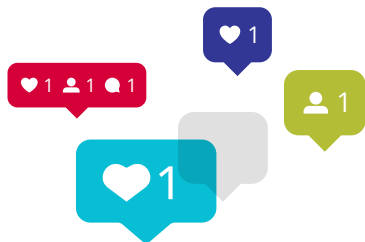
You probably know of incidents in which friends or people you know have said or posted things about other people they would never say to each other directly. There seems to be something about "virtual" online connections that makes people feel less real and therefore, certain actions seem less hurtful. Things said in the "safety" of social media can still be very hurtful or have a big impact on people's feelings. High levels of drama on social media can leave people stressed and unhappy.

Remember, too, that it is hard to erase things that have been posted. Careless use of social media can leave people in conflict with each other and lead to problems that can contribute to stress and other challenges.

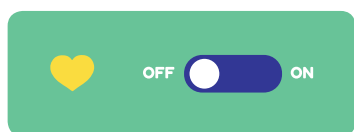
For your own health and wellness, try your best to be a thoughtful and positive user of social media.

Practical steps to mindful media use

How can you take action and set yourself up for healthy social media interactions?
There are a few simple tips we recommend:



Only follow accounts that make you feel good and empowered.



Turn off notifications for likes or comments.



Set a time limit for how much time you spend on social media each day.



Give yourself a "curfew" for social media.



Ask yourself before each post, "Is this something I want to share with everyone and am I comfortable with it possibly being able to never remove it from the internet?"