

Managing social media



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Since the coronavirus shutdowns, our lives have been disrupted greatly and usual routines have changed for most of us. Lots of people have found themselves scrolling more on social media than before.

Social media can be an enriching tool for our lives; a place for connections and communities. Social media can boost our mental health through its content and by facilitating connections that make us feel less alone. It can educate us, entertain us, and give users a platform to share their voices - where users can become changemakers.

But social media can also be a place where a small proportion of users use it to discriminate, say negative things or even act in hateful ways. It can, in some instances, threaten the personal security of its' users.

There are a few key aspects of social media which can negatively impact your mental health and wellbeing especially if you are already finding things difficult. This booklet aims to highlight these issues and offer advice and guidance on how to navigate social media and minimise the negative impact that it can have on your mental health and wellbeing.

This booklet has been written by Louisa Rose, a freelance social media expert and Parent Champion at the Anna Freud Centre who advocates around the impact of social media on mental health, and staff from the Centre.

The content of this booklet was shared with the Centre's Young Champions for comments and feedback before publication.



Key aspects of social media

Privacy

If your privacy settings are not watertight, your personal and cyber safety could be compromised. Many platforms offer you the option of having a personal or private public profile. Make sure you check your settings regularly as sometimes automatic app updates can affect your privacy settings. If your profile is set to private your profile picture and username may still show. If you are uncertain, perhaps ask a parent, carer or trusted friend or relative to check your privacy settings. Better to be safe than sorry.

The content we see

The content you see has been tailored for you based on the information you have given (often without realising you have!). Information that you have given on sign up will often include your name, date of birth, location among other types of data.

On top of that, the way you actually use social media gives the platforms even more information. They know who your friends are by the accounts you interact with most. They know where you are at that precise moment if you use geotagging (providing location information). They know what you are truly invested in; fashion, DIY, mental health, music etc. They know which hashtags you use and search and which users you send private messages to.

Information we share

Try to limit content online to the people you know and trust and try not to share personal details such as where you live or go to school or college with those you do not know offline. If someone you only know online is pressuring you in to sharing information or images with them or trying to get you to meet with them, tell your parent, carer or a trusted adult who can help report the situation and keep you safe. Think also about what you share as you may not want everyone to see every post and certain things you may prefer to send as a direct message to a friend or group of friends or talk to someone about face-to-face.



Passwords

Having your social media accounts hacked or hijacked can be very distressing. It means that people will have access to personal and private information that you may prefer to keep to yourself (and can result in identity theft). If this happens, you should immediately change your password. Set a strong password by mixing characters, letters and special characters and try to not use the same password for every social media account. Store your passwords in your browser using a verified online password manager if you are worried about forgetting them.

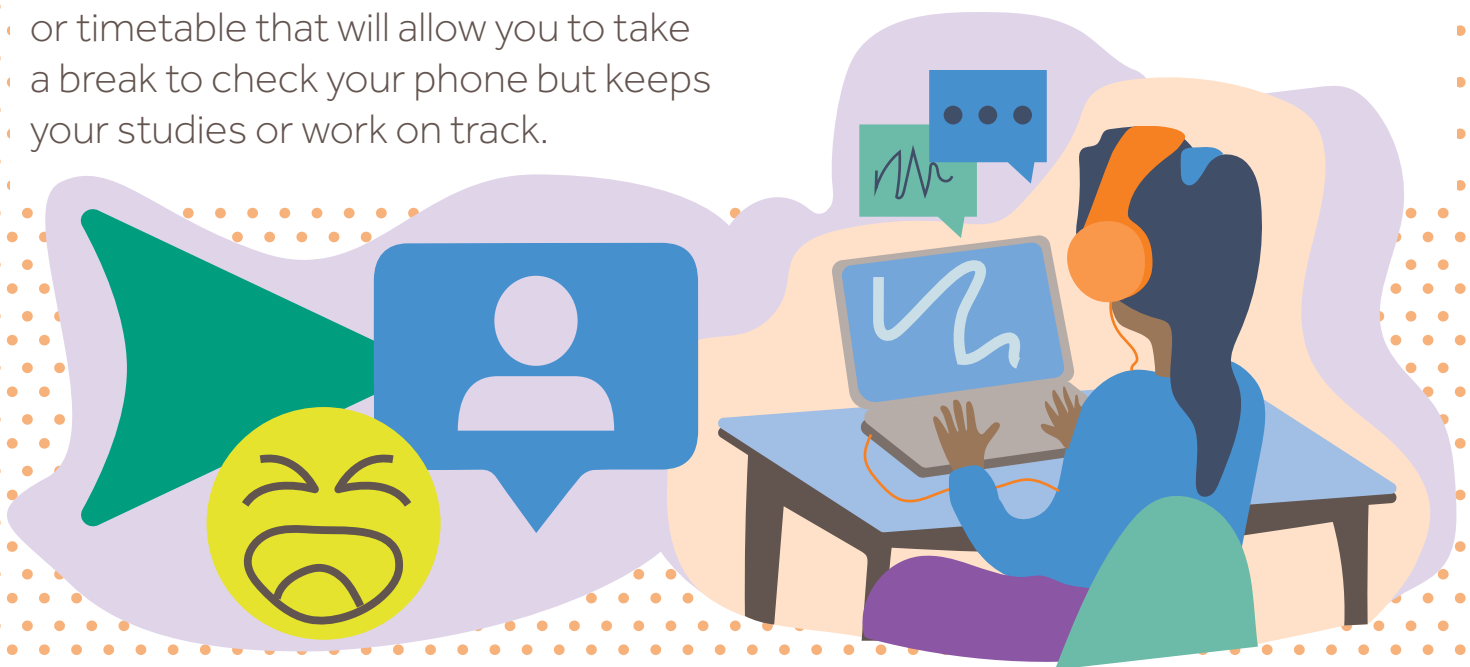
Time spent

Social media platforms are designed to be addictive. It's easy to while away time scrolling without realising that 2 hours have gone by. Consider a cut-off time at night where you can put your phone down to help get a good night's sleep. If possible, have a separate alarm clock so you can charge your phone outside of your room. Similarly, if you have homework or deadlines, create a plan or timetable that will allow you to take a break to check your phone but keeps your studies or work on track.

Minimum age requirements

Most social media platforms are recommended for use by those aged 13 or over. However, many young people are able to set up an account or have one set up by a parent or carer.

Whilst it is great to have a social media account, it's also important to be protected from people who might want to exploit you. That's why you should talk to your parent or carer about how they might monitor your usage including what you post and who you are friends with. Whilst this may sometimes cause frustration and feel like your privacy is being invaded, try to remember that young people are at risk of cyber-bullying by their peers and grooming by adults and that your parents or carers are only trying to keep you safe. You should feel able to tell your parents, carers or a trusted adult if you ever feel unsafe or upset by your social media use and for them to step in and help keep you safe where necessary.



How to make the most of social media whilst protecting your mental health and wellbeing

Post responsibly

Every social media user has a responsibility to ensure that the content they post isn't harmful to others. Unfortunately, cyber-bullying and trolling, images of violence, illegal activities, intimidating behaviour and other negative content remains prevalent and continued exposure can affect your mood and impact on the mental health of yourself and others. Make a concerted effort to set an example and show others how positive a place social media can be by filling it with motivating, interesting and inspiring content; with content that is a true representation of reality so that we cultivate a world where we celebrate each other rather than compare ourselves to one another.

Use In-app time management tools

Most apps and devices now have tools to help you manage the time spent in social media apps. Some will help you set daily limits and remember you can always turn off notifications so that you don't feel the urge to instantly check any notification messages or updates.



Curate your feed

Follow accounts that make you feel good. Think *inspiration* versus *comparison*.

The number of accounts we follow can creep up without us realising it. Regularly review the accounts you are following. Does their content make you feel good about yourself or do you find yourself in a state of comparison? If it's the latter, unfollow!

Try to surround yourself by content that adds value to your life. Find experts in fields you are interested in or accounts that share true and honest reflections of life; follow hashtags that share positive messages within the content they bring up.

Spend a little time curating your account so that you see a healthier, balanced and more inspiring reflection of life. The algorithms learn from the information you give them so make sure you're giving them the right data.

If someone you follow is posting stuff which you do not like or which makes you feel low, anxious, angry or upset, you can mute them for a short period or consider whether you may wish to remove them altogether.



Don't compare yourself to strangers

It is easy to feel inadequate when we scroll through social media and see accounts of people living their best life, posting images of themselves being social and happy, and comparing their life to yours. Don't feel bad if and when you find yourself comparing yourself to others, this is a natural reaction. But do try to remember that what you see may not always be the whole truth. People may choose not to share their struggles online and many will use facial filters to enhance their appearance or cover their own perceived imperfections.

If you are finding it hard not to compare your life to others, try to limit your time on social media or mute profiles which may be affecting your mood so that your time online is not contributing to you feeling low or anxious. Maybe use this time to focus on your own wellbeing which may include any [self-care strategies](#) which help you including setting [realistic goals](#) for yourself.



Online abuse and harassment

Online abuse and harassment can be really upsetting and may include messages or comments that are directed at you online or via text messages or messaging apps. These may make you feel sad or anxious and can contribute to low self-esteem, self-harm, eating disorders and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts.

Reporting and blocking on social media will flag the account as one which might be harmful and allows the platforms to take actions to make their platforms safer.

It is also important to inform a parent, carer or trusted adult if you are experiencing any form of online abuse so that they can help you address these issues. This might include reporting any bullies online to a school or college to highlight this behaviour and may include seeking additional support from your GP or a mental health professional where necessary.

It is also important to recognise that social media can distribute content which you may find triggering and which is harmful or hurtful to certain communities. Recent videos of police brutality against the Black community in America will resonate with the experiences of young Black people in the UK. LGBTQI+ youth may witness homophobia, biphobia and transphobia which may not be directed at them but which it is impossible not to take personally and be upset by. Hopefully you are able to talk about these issues in your school or college and within your family and peer groups. However, if you are unable to speak to your family about any issues that upset or affect you, you can always talk to trained volunteers on the free [AFC Crisis Messenger](#) service or find national organisations offering support by phone, text or email on the Centre's [Urgent Help](#) page.



What can I do to protect myself?

1. If you're feeling low or anxious, there are over [90 self-care strategies](#) identified and written by young people on [On My Mind](#), our free resource to help young people manage their mental health and wellbeing.
2. There are a range of apps available for mental health but how do you know which ones are safe and effective? Our [Apps delivering self-help strategies](#) page includes apps that have been through a quality assurance process and which can help with a range of issues, from helping you get better sleep to helping you manage your emotions.
3. If you're worried about a friend who might be going through a rough patch or struggling with their mental health, our [Helping Someone Else](#) resource has some tips written by other young people. It includes advice on how to talk to someone you're worried about, how to look after yourself when supporting someone, and how to seek help from an adult if you become seriously worried.
4. Remember that you are in control over what you share and, mostly, over what you consume. You can make social media a positive experience for others by sharing content which is fun and inspiring and by not contributing to negative or harmful language or behaviour.
5. [Taking some time away](#) from technology can help reduce anxiety. Try to factor breaks from your phone during the day and consider tech free days where you can just unwind without having to worry about notifications or responding to messages.
6. Finally, if you are struggling with social media and you feel it is impacting on your mental health and wellbeing, it is important that you talk to a parent, carer or trusted adult who can help you. Often, just talking to a trusted adult can help you feel better but, if you've been feeling low or anxious for a long time or struggling with other mental health issues, they can help you access more support through your GP or a mental health professional.



Where can I find support?

If you or someone you know needs help right now, you should, if possible, try to talk to a parent or carer or a trusted adult such as your GP.

If talking to an adult is not possible, you can find a list of organisation which offer 24 hour support by text, email and phone on our [Urgent Help](#) page or below:

Do you need help right now?

The [AFC Crisis Messenger](#) text service provides free, 24/7 crisis support for young people across the UK

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and need support, you can text **AFC** to **85258**.



childline

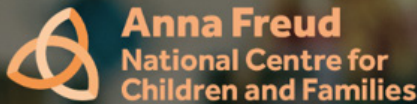
Call: 0800 1111
email | online chat

SAMARITANS

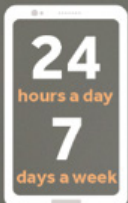
Call: 116 123
email | visit | write

Emergency Services

Call: 999



In crisis? Need support?



Text **AFC** to 85258

Text the free, anonymous crisis textline

All texts are answered by trained volunteers,
with support from experienced clinical specialists