

Tips for Managing Social Media and Additional Resources

Try these simple changes to live more intentionally with your devices right now. Social media is a place where we can connect, a place to share with others, and a place to express our feelings. It can also be a place of self-comparison, constant FOMO, a way to channel addictive tendencies, and overall can be quite harmful for our mental health. We do have a choice when it comes to managing the way we use it. Here are a few tips for leading a balanced lifestyle with the overwhelming presence of social media.

Turn off all notifications except from people.

Notifications appear in red dots because red is a trigger color that instantly draws our attention. But most notifications are generated by machines, not actual people. Visit Settings > Notifications and turn off all notifications, banners, and badges, except from apps where real people want your attention; e.g. messaging apps like WhatsApp, FB Messenger, Signal, Telegram, WeChat etc.

Go Grayscale.

Colorful icons give our brains shiny rewards every time we unlock them. Set your phone to grayscale to remove those positive reinforcements. Go to Settings > General > Accessibility > Accessibility Shortcut (bottom) > Color Filters. This allows you to quickly triple-tap the home button to toggle grayscale on and off, so you keep color when you need it. (iOS)

Try keeping your home screen to tools only.

Limit your first page of apps to just tools—the apps you use for quick in-and-out tasks like Maps, Camera, Calendar, Notes, or Lyft. Move the rest of your apps, especially mindless choices, off the first page and into folders. Launch other apps by typing. Swipe down and type the app you want to open instead of leaving bad habits on the home screen. On Android you can use the Search Box on your home screen. iOS: For best results, turn off Siri Suggestions (Settings > Siri & Search > Siri Suggestions to off)

Texting shortcut:

Use quick reactions. On iOS, press and hold on a text message and you'll see this menu of quick reactions. It's faster than crafting a response, and can also add some context, giving a taste of the emotion that's often silently conveyed in a real, face-to-face conversation.

Charge your device outside the bedroom.

Get a separate alarm clock in your bedroom and charge your phone in another room (or on the other side of the room). This way, you can wake up without getting sucked into your phone before you even get out of bed.

Use technology to protect yourself from technology.

Time-tracking apps like Moment, Quality Time and (OFFTIME) will measure how much time you're spending on your screen. Freedom and Flipd let you block your access to problematic apps and websites. Apple now has a "Do Not Disturb While Driving" mode that sends customizable automated text message responses so that you can step away from your phone without worrying that you'll leave someone hanging. Litespace does the same for Android and displays a timer on your lock screen showing you how much time you've managed to stay unplugged. Apple has also rolled out a new feature that calculates weekly screen time.

Remove social media from your phone.

If you really want to use your phone less, we recommend removing all the major social media apps from your phone. It's the easiest way to cut back, as these apps can easily gobble up so much of our time.

Set your phone down.

If you don't treat your phone as a necessity for daily life, you won't wire your brain to think it is one. Leave your phone at home while you go for a walk. Stare out of a window during your commute instead of checking your email. At first, you may be surprised by how powerfully you crave your phone. (Note: Do keep it close by in case your kids, friends, family, or colleagues are trying to get a hold of you. Your phone can be useful for communication.)

Use the sight of others on their phones as a reminder of your own intentions

The sight of someone else pulling out his or her phone on the elevator probably makes you want to check yours as well. But with practice, you can transform this into a cue for a new, healthier habit. When seeing other people reach for their phones, try to use it as a cue to take a deep breath and relax.

Set times to go on social media.

Don't pick up your phone and open Instagram or Twitter whenever you think of it. Rather set a couple breaks throughout the day to check updates. This will help break out of habits. Another solution is to create "speed bumps": small obstacles that force you to slow down and make sure that when you do check your phone, it's the result of a conscious choice. Put a rubber band around your phone as a physical reminder to pause, or set a lock screen image that asks you to confirm that you really want to proceed.

Log out of social media apps.

Logging out of social media apps on our phones helps the time spent on them feel more final. It also adds another step when trying to go back on and check social media. Adding another obstacle when it comes to going on social media can decrease the likelihood of going on the apps in the first place.

Keep your phone out of your hand when speaking to someone.

Being able to communicate without a phone in hand or readily accessible is an important skill. It also shows that you care about the conversation you are having.

Call a friend or family member.

Texting or emailing can sometimes feel like a chore. Talking on the phone is a more natural and communicative way of checking in with those who are close to you. (Note: this tip isn't for everyone or for all circumstances)

During class or at work, don't keep your phone on your desk.

Having our phone in our peripherals, within arms reach, or in our pockets can be distracting. Without having your phone or devices in sight will keep us focused on our work and help us be more productive. Instead, put your phone in a drawer or your bag.

Reframe the way you think about social media.

Many people equate spending less time on their phones with denying themselves pleasure — and who likes to do that? Instead, think of it this way: The time you spend on your phone is time you're not spending doing other pleasurable things, like hanging out with a friend or pursuing a hobby. Instead of thinking of it as "spending less time on your phone," think of it as "spending more time on your life."

Ask yourself what you want to pay attention to.

When we decide what to pay attention to in the moment, we are making a broader decision about how we want to spend our time. The people who design apps desperately want our attention, because that's how they make money. Have you ever wondered why so many social media apps are free? It's because advertisers are the customers — and your attention is what's being sold. So ask yourself: What do you want to pay attention to?

Set yourself up for success.

Create triggers that will remind you of your goals and make it easier to live up to them. If you want to spend more time reading, leave a book on your bedside table. If you want to cook more, lay out a shopping list for that recipe you're eager to try. On the flip side, avoid triggers that will set you up for failure. Delete social media apps from your phone. Disable notifications. Establish a rule for yourself and your family of not keeping phones on the table during meals.

Pay attention to your body.

When you notice that you're in the midst of a phone spiral, ask yourself: What's your posture like? How's your breathing? Is whatever you're doing on your phone making you feel good? Do you want to be using it right now? The more tuned in you are to your own experiences in the moment, the easier it will be to change your behavior.

Get existential about it.

If all else fails, consider your own mortality. How many people on their deathbeds do you think are going to say, "I wish I'd spent more time on Facebook"? Keep asking yourself the same question.

(Tips powered by Center for Humane Technology, Catherine Price - author of "How to Break Up With Your Phone" & iMPACTFUL. Tips have been edited for length and clarity.)

Additional Resources for Parents:

Screen Sanity- Screen Sanity is an international nonprofit that equips parents to be mentors and guides so kids grow up happy and healthy in an increasingly digital world. We offer a variety of tips, tools and trainings, all designed to help families maximize the benefits of technology while minimizing the harmful side effects. Join us in creating a world where kids are captivated by life, not screens. <https://screensanity.org>

Osprey Kids- Osprey Kids is a parent-based group committed to helping our kids achieve social media-free childhoods until they graduate high school. When adolescents have no access to social media, they gain access to deeper engagement with their families, interests and self-assurance. <https://ospreykids.com>

Let Grow- Let Grow believes today's kids are smarter and stronger than our culture gives them credit for. We are making it easy, normal and legal to give kids the independence they need to grow into capable, confident, and happy adults. When we let go we... Let Grow. <https://letgrow.org>

Common Sense Media- We believe in media that inspires and entertains families of all kinds. In technology that protects privacy and supports communities. In learning tools that prepare students and teachers for success in a connected world. Discover how we're working to make the digital world better for kids and families. <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parents-ultimate-guides>

Videos/Webinars-

Toxic Online Culture: Unpacking the Influence of Social Media, Memes, Gaming (and More)

The online world in which our kids are immersed is a mixed bag. It's full of connections to friends and avenues for learning, as well as wonderful reminders of the beauty of the world. But there are also toxic elements that pop up in gaming chat rooms, through viral jokes and memes, and across social media.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/CcGWUGXTwDs?si=ZV6bPsC0OTFJiaK2>

Teens, Screens, and Social Media with Lisa Damour and Professor Nate Persily

<https://youtu.be/chSSidMgJG8?si=EMC8OjRi2YGrVlws>