

A Guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues.

Issues covered in this guide include:

- Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis
- Coping With Anxiety
- Coping With Depression
- Coping With Stress
- Coping With Bullying & Cyber-bullying
- Active Listening and how it can help

#### Help And Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family get immediate support and information 24/7 by FreeTexting **HELP** to **50015**. Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit.

For information on Emergency Contacts, National Helplines, Local Support Groups and your nearest Places of Safety visit [www.ineedhelp.ie](http://www.ineedhelp.ie)

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112

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# Coping *with*

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH



**COPING WITH DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND STRESS**  
Short guides to coping with common mental health issues

# Coping *with*

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Many of us enjoy using social media to keep in contact with our friends, to share photos and stories with each other, and to keep up to date with news and celebrity gossip. Social media is also a great way to follow the latest in fashion, lifestyle, fitness and health.

However, social media can sadly become addictive. This tends to happen slowly, and in some cases, you may not even realise that you have come to rely on being able to check your socials every few minutes. In this article we will look at how social media can become addictive, the impact it might have on your mental health, and how you can prevent it having a negative impact on you.

## How Can Social Media Affect Mental Health?

Social media can be great. It allows you to communicate with people all around the world, build networks with people who have similar interests to you, maintain relationships even if you live in a rural area, and express your creativity. Lots of teenagers enjoy sharing their daily life with friends, acquaintances and strangers on platforms including Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram.

However, using social media regularly may increase the risk of mental health concerns including anxiety and depression. This may occur because:

- Seeing other people's lives, whether friends or celebrities, can make you feel that your own life is less interesting
- You may feel inadequate if you compare yourselves to others
- It's hard not to fall prey to FOMO (fear of missing out) when you are bombarded by images of what everyone else is doing
- Being on social media may make you feel more lonely
- You risk becoming self-obsessed by worrying about what you will share next
- Cyber-bullying may occur
- You may become addicted to using social media.



# What Are the Signs That You Might Be Addicted to Social Media?

Lots of people use social media without it affecting their mental health. However, as social media sites are designed to keep you scrolling, it is not surprising that they can become addictive or start to negatively affect your mental health in other ways.

You may start to wonder if your mental health is being affected by social media if you:

- Only want to post on social media to get likes, shares or comments from others, rather than because the post itself gives you pleasure
- Feel worried that you might have missed something that is socially important if you haven't been on social media all day
- Don't want to spend time with family or friends, because you would rather be on social media
- Feel anxious, sad or depressed after seeing other people's lives online
- Start spending more and more time online
- No longer have time for schoolwork or coursework because you want to spend time online
- Spend a lot of time thinking about, planning, writing and illustrating your posts to make your point and get more likes
- Try to get more likes by engaging in risky behaviours to share online, such as dangerous physical dares or posting embarrassing or sexually explicit material
- Feel tired or irritable because you have stayed up late to scroll through different platforms.



# What Causes Addiction to Social Media?

It is estimated that around 210 million users worldwide have become addicted to the internet, so if you find it hard not to go on social media, you are not alone.

The companies behind social platforms have designed them to keep you online. The longer they can keep you scrolling, the more likely they are to make money from advertising or in-app games.

Those who become addicted to social media get feelings of satisfaction, joy or relief when they start scrolling. When they cannot use social media, however, they may feel irritable, frustrated or anxious about when they can next log in. This is because for those who are addicted, using social media activates the reward centres in the brain to give a pleasurable feeling.

Unfortunately, using social media is likely to only give you a fleeting feeling of happiness or satisfaction. Getting 'likes' or endorsements from others in the form of comments or other responses might make you feel popular, and give you validation for your opinions or thoughts. It is always flattering to have others agree with what you think. However, in the long-term, relying on others approval to get this feeling of satisfaction could make you unhappy.



If you already feel lonely, anxious or have low self-esteem, seeking likes or approval from others can make you feel temporarily satisfied in yourself. However, if you don't get the likes or endorsement you were hoping for, it can make you feel a lot worse. It may also make you feel more determined to get more likes next time you post, causing you to become obsessed with posting regularly to get the buzz or satisfaction you crave.

# How Can I Avoid Becoming Addicted to Social Media?

Social media is designed to keep you hooked, but there are plenty of ways you can try to avoid becoming addicted.

- Leave your phone in another room when you are eating meals
- Turn off notifications so that you are not tempted onto social media
- If you decide to go on social media, put a timer on for 15 minutes, and stop scrolling when the alarm goes off
- Put your phone into grayscale mode – using your phone in black and white makes it feel less appealing, reducing the chance of addiction
- Put your phone on silent at night, and leave it in another room. This will help to avoid scrolling late into the night or being woken by notifications
- Set up an app to monitor or limit the amount of time you spend on social media each day
- Get rid of apps that you don't use or enjoy
- Reduce the number of friends you have on social media. Limiting yourself to the most important people in your life means you'll have less scrolling to do, and fewer people to compare yourself to
- Enjoy a digital detox by having time away from your phone, even if it's only for 20 minutes while you do some exercise or go for a walk.

## Final Thoughts

Social media is enjoyed by many people around the world. However, it is designed to keep you scrolling and in some people it can become addictive. There are many steps you can take to avoid becoming addicted, such as limiting the amount of time you spend on social media, turning off notifications, and taking a break from your phone.



# I have a friend who might have an addiction to social media. What can I do to help them?

Social media addiction is a behavioural addiction. This means the addiction is based on the desire to do something, rather than to a food, substance or chemical. Those who are addicted to social media have a strong urge to scroll so that they feel better or happier. In some cases, the amount of time spent on social media starts to impact other areas of life, such as school and friendships.

If you think a friend might have an addiction to social media, it is important to understand that it will be hard for them to try to cut down or stop using it. However, you can be supportive in the following ways:

- Ask how they feel about social media, and whether it gives them a positive or negative feeling
- Ask if they would find it hard to cut down on social media usage, and whether they feel irritated or upset if they can't access certain platforms
- Suggest a digital detox, or an hour or more spent without their phone each day
- Suggest that they have screen-free time at mealtimes, at school or at bedtime
- Invite them to social events or other activities that will be a good distraction from their phone.

If you are worried about a friend, you will need to seek advice from an adult such as a parent, teacher, counselor, or a doctor. Like alcohol and drug addictions, it can be very hard to break the cycle of addiction and some people will require professional help.



# I think my child might have a social media addiction, what are the signs?

Most teenagers enjoy using their phone, but you may become concerned if your child can't seem to put theirs down. A child who has an addiction to social media may never be without their phone, and may become defensive when you question the amount of time they spend using it.

Just as someone with an alcohol addiction will find it impossible to have a day without alcohol, someone with a social media addiction will feel unable to manage without logging into their preferred platforms. This is because for those with an addiction, social media activates the reward centres of the brain, giving the user a pleasurable feeling. If your child has a social media addiction, you may notice strong emotions such as anger, sadness or despair when you:



- Mention their phone use
- Suggest that they cut down
- Try to implement a digital detox
- Mention that they are neglecting other areas of life, such as schoolwork or friendships.

If it seems that your child is unable to manage without social media, they may have an addiction to it.

# What should I do if my child has a social media addiction?

If you are concerned that your child has an addiction to social media, try not to despair. Like most addictions, it is possible to reduce social media use to overcome the desire to use it. If your child accepts that they struggle without social media, you can support them in trying:

- A digital detox
- Less screen time
- Phone-free time at home
- Not having their phone in their bedroom at night
- Taking a break from social media accounts
- Using their phone in grayscale mode
- Turning off notifications.



If your child denies that there is a problem with social media usage, or does not want to stop using social media, you may need to seek advice from a professional such as a teacher, doctor or addiction specialist. This is particularly important if the addiction is affecting other areas of their life such as their friendships, sleep, hobbies, or education.



# Help and Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

You can also get immediate support and information 24/7 by

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Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service



For information on:

- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge

 [www.ineedhelp.ie](http://www.ineedhelp.ie)

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# About Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland was founded in 2007 as there were no national charities focusing specifically on the problems and issues of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland. We now provide a range of services aimed at mental health awareness and suicide prevention amongst teenagers.



We run our “Four Steps to Help” Programme for schools and colleges around Ireland which provides Zoom workshops. We also have a video workshop presented by John Sharpson that any organisation can book through our website at [schools.yspi.ie/video.php](http://schools.yspi.ie/video.php) We provide a wide range of free information including our “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” magazine delivered to schools and organisations as well as the “Coping With” series of mental health guides.

We also operate a **24/7 FreeText Crisis Information Service** and fund a Youth Crisis Counselling Service.

Full details are available at [www.yspi.ie](http://www.yspi.ie)

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