

MAY 2023

Boundaries in the Expanding Digital Age

TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Twitch, YouTube, and Reddit are just a few of the social media platforms that all generations are navigating in 2023. They can be useful tools for connection, entertainment, sharing a slice of life, or learning about new topics. The use of technology such as social media platforms, including instant messengers, have been linked to increased depression, anxiety, and even physical ailments by various studies. This month, we dive deeper into how social media and digital connections may be impacting daily life.



Pressure to be Plugged In

As we continue to advance in use and access to digital technology, there is an increasing pressure to be “in the know” and to be consistently checking in on the latest trends, news, memes, and more. Having access to our friends and family members in an instant is extremely supportive for some, while also adding a layer of needing to be present for others at the drop of a hat. This pressure is present at workplaces as well, with different chat networks and instant access to emails reminding us of deadlines and tasks with a simple “ding.” Additionally, some people experience “Fear of Missing Out” or “FOMO,” increasing our need to plug in and spend our time online. The need to be connected can lead to many unhealthy habits and challenges that are difficult to get away from.

Social Relationships

While having access to friends 24/7 can be a supportive feature of many social media platforms, it can also lead to unfair or unrealistic expectations of relationships and comparisons to others. Individuals can post a perfectly curated set of pictures or videos of their lives on the internet which does not truly reflect their day-to-day interactions, struggles, or successes. Expectations of leaving comments or liking someone’s post is another added pressure of these relationships. According to an article written for the University of Utah’s healthcare website, social media is likened to an advertisement. We can curate a specific image or “brand” for others to consume that is “reinforced by the currency of likes and shares.”

How Can We Change?

Social media use has been likened to gambling. Dr. Jacqueline Sperling, Ph.D., a doctor at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts, states that like a slot machine, the positive feedback and dopamine rush from social media is unpredictable. This is what keeps us coming back. It will be no small challenge to make changes, however, with small steps, you can build new habits and healthy boundaries around social media. Below is a list of ideas to help you or your children/teens reduce time on social media:

- Limit use. Start with small 10-minute breaks where you put your phone down each day during your usual social media usage.
- Keep your phone out of your bedroom at night to resist the temptation to stay up using social media.
- Delete the apps from your home screen. Having less easy access and not seeing them upon opening your phone can reduce the urge to open the app and refresh it often.
- Model this behavior for your children/teens. If you are setting the example, they will learn healthy behaviors from you and find a sense of togetherness in making change.
- Use parenting restrictions on your kids' phones to restrict the time they can spend using specific apps.
- Disable notifications. If you aren't notified of new content/comments/likes, you will be less tempted to get back online.

Artist's Corner: Self-Esteem Tower

Here is an art activity you can do while taking a break from social media. This activity is meant to focus on building self-esteem (from <https://arttherapyresources.com.au/>).

Supplies: Poster board, coloring tools (paint, markers, etc), glue or tape, a marker for writing words, and scrap paper.

1. Start by creating your background and decorating your poster board any way you like.
2. Using the scraps of paper, write down words of positive traits you have, to create the building blocks.
3. Create a "base" of your tower in any shape and write "Tower of Me" on it.
4. Glue down your base to the poster board, then stack each of your self-esteem blocks on top until your tower is as big as you want (you can tape more than one poster board together).
5. Hang it somewhere you will see every day.

