

The Do's of Social Media

When it comes to social media, you've probably had a lot of people telling you what not to do. But the reality is that there are a lot of things you shouldn't do in every life situation, and that's not always helpful. Instead here's a list of do's for social media to help your mental health.



DO SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

LIMIT SCREEN TIME.

Do some research to figure out what works best for you to limit screen time. Some people like to have social media use blocked between certain hours or timeframes, while others prefer to have time limits on certain apps. Check your phone settings or download a website/app blocker. You can also try to make it harder for yourself to log on in the first place by removing the apps for a few days or longer. The goal is to make sure you aren't spending excessive amounts of time on social – it's up to you how to achieve that.

Teens and young adults who reduced their social media use by 50% for just a few weeks saw significant improvement in how they felt about their weight and overall appearance compared with peers who maintained consistent levels of social media use.

BE INTENTIONAL.

When you do use social media, it can be easy to keep scrolling, and scrolling, and scrolling. But it is possible to break this cycle. Decide your reason for logging on before you do. Did you just want to share a picture or see what someone specific is up to? Do you need a quick laugh or to send a message? Do whatever you meant to do and sign off when you're finished. This is extra important during bad or breaking news when it's easy to start doomscrolling.

DO FOCUS ON GENUINE CONNECTIONS

STRENGTHEN EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS.

Social media is meant to be social. Use the platforms you're on to boost the friendships you already have. It's a great way to stay in touch with friends who go to other schools, classmates who have moved away, or faraway family.

ENGAGE IN MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS.

There are lots of ways to connect online about things you're interested in and care about. Sharing your experiences and interests in a positive way can bring healthy connections. Just be careful of comment sections that are more arguments than conversations.



DO CREATE A FEEL-GOOD FEED

UNFOLLOW OR MUTE CONTENT THAT BOTHERS YOU.

Certain accounts might come to mind, like ones that post images that make you uncomfortable or promote extreme dieting. But this can even extend to influencers who trigger thoughts of self-comparison, an old friend, or an ex. Muting users or groups that post content that bothers you is a great option if you don't want to unfollow, and they won't even know.

FOLLOW ACCOUNTS THAT INSPIRE AND UPLIFT YOU.

Just like social media can have negative content, there is also good out there. Look for accounts that post the kind of things that make you feel good – funny animal videos, good news, memes, or even just pretty nature photos.

DO KNOW WHAT'S REAL AND WHAT'S FAKE

REMEMBER SOCIAL MEDIA IS ONLY A HIGHLIGHT REEL.

No matter how perfect someone's life seems, everyone has insecurities, challenges, and plain old bad days – they just aren't posting about it. It's not fair to compare your entire life to the Insta-worthy parts of someone else's.

CHECK YOUR SOURCES.

There's a lot of misinformation on social media, from rumors to clickbait to inaccurate news, and it can spread quickly. It's important to be mindful of who is sharing information and where they got it from. Do some fact-checking if something seems too good to be true or feels off.

DO PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY

BE CAUTIOUS OF WHAT YOU POST AND SEND.

Once something is posted online, it's out there forever, and it could potentially come up when you (or your parents) Google your name. Something you post today could be found years later – by your family, a partner, or the person hiring for the job you really want. Even if you're sharing things privately, the person you're sharing with might not respect your wishes to keep things between the two of you.

BE CAREFUL WITH STRANGERS.

It's pretty common to interact with people you don't know online, and a lot of people make new connections and friendships on social media. But being behind a screen can also make it easier for someone to pretend to be someone else or take advantage of you. If you feel weird about a stranger online, your best bet is to block them.



DO HANDLE OFFENSIVE AND UNSAFE CONTENT

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS.

If something on social media seems suspicious, uncomfortable, or potentially harmful, trust your instincts and take it seriously. Avoid interacting with the content or the person involved. Engaging further might escalate the situation or put you at risk. Do report to a trusted person any threats of violence to you, a classmate, or anyone else.

ASK FOR HELP IF THINGS GET OUT OF HAND.

If you don't know what to do in a situation, look for an adult you trust, such as a parent, guardian, teacher, coach, school counselor, or another responsible adult in your life. Choose someone who is approachable, understanding, and supportive. It can be embarrassing to talk about the situation but be honest and straightforward about the problem you're having – even if it started because you shared something you probably shouldn't have. Explain how it's affecting you. If you have screenshots, messages, or any other evidence, share it with the adult to help them better understand the situation and figure out what to do.

FLAG AND REPORT IF NEEDED.

Many social media platforms have mechanisms for reporting inappropriate content or behavior. If you see something that troubles you, do report or flag the user or content. Odds are, if you find a post disturbing, others have thought the same thing.



If you think your time online is affecting your mental health, take the youth mental health test at mhascreening.org, and check out MHA's book "Where to Start" for tips on how to take action.

In crisis? Help is available! Call 988 or chat 988lifeline.org. You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.

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Empowering Lives. Impacting Community.