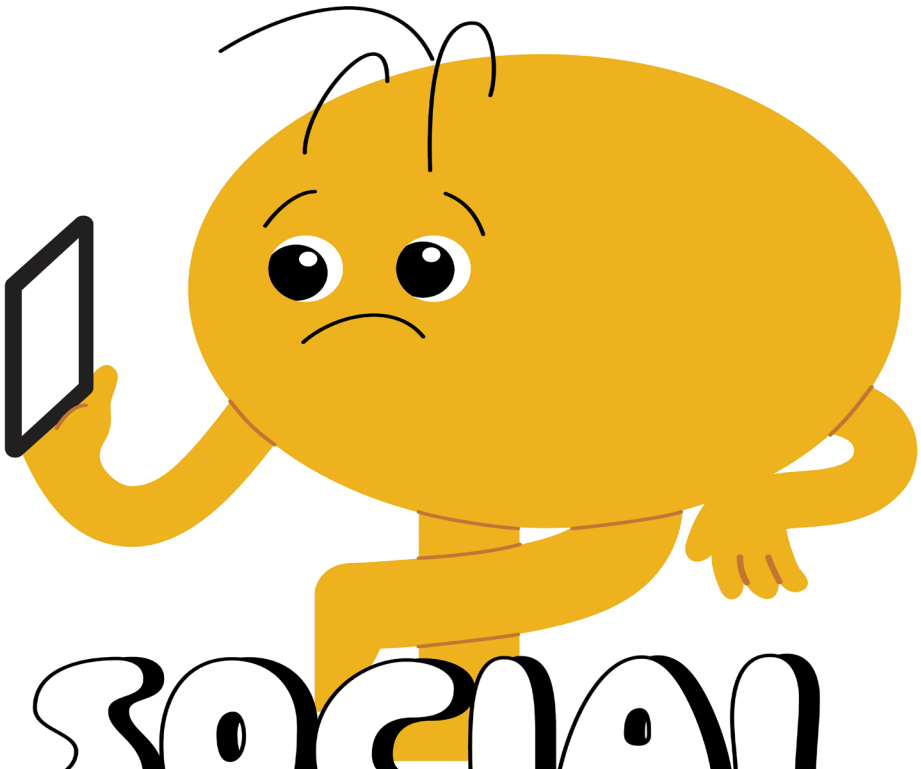

SOCIAL MEDIA

So many of today's social interactions happen on the internet. With billions of people logging on each day, you may feel a lot of pressure to keep up with what's happening online.

Remember: It's important to take breaks and reconnect with people face-to-face. If you ever feel unsafe on social media or feel like social media is taking a toll on your mental health, it's probably a good idea to log off for a little while.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health has been a hot-button topic lately, so let's review the facts to make sure we're all on the same page.

Mental health is a general state of well-being that enables us to cope with life's ups and downs. Strong mental health helps us realize our abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to our communities.

MENTAL HEALTH: MYTH VS. REALITY

MYTH	REALITY
"Mental health" and "mental illness" are the same thing.	"Mental health" refers to a person's overall emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It's a part of everyone's life, whether they feel good or bad. "Mental illness" is a broad term for a group of conditions that require a professional diagnosis. A mental illness can limit a person's ability to function, so it's important for a person with a mental illness to get help. Unlike mental health, not everyone has a mental illness.
People with mental illnesses are dangerous.	Most people with mental illnesses are not violent or dangerous. Stereotyping people with mental illness can lead to stigma and discourage them from getting support.
Asking for help with mental health is a sign of weakness.	Reaching out for help takes strength and courage. Everyone needs support sometimes.
It's easy to tell when someone is struggling with a mental illness.	Mental illness doesn't have a "look," and lots of people hide their struggles. That's why checking in on your friends and taking mental health seriously is important.

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WHAT'S A COPING STRATEGY?

You saw the words "coping strategies" in the introduction, and you'll see them a lot more over the next sixty or so pages. But what exactly is a coping strategy? How does it work? Basically, a **coping strategy** is a method a person uses to manage stress and difficult situations.

There are two categories of coping strategies: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

A **problem-focused** coping strategy involves actively addressing the source of your stress. For example, if you're stressed about an upcoming test, you could study extra hard so that you feel ready to tackle the exam when the time comes.

An **emotion-focused** coping strategy aims to regulate the emotions you feel during times of stress. Keeping with the test example, an emotion-based coping strategy might mean journaling about why you're stressed. Are you worried about grades? College? Letting yourself down? Naming these feelings can help you tame them.

The coping strategies in this book are mostly emotion-focused strategies, such as breathing exercises and journaling activities. Some might feel a little funny at first, but give them a shot anyway — it never hurts to try! You might be surprised at what works for your unique brain.

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WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

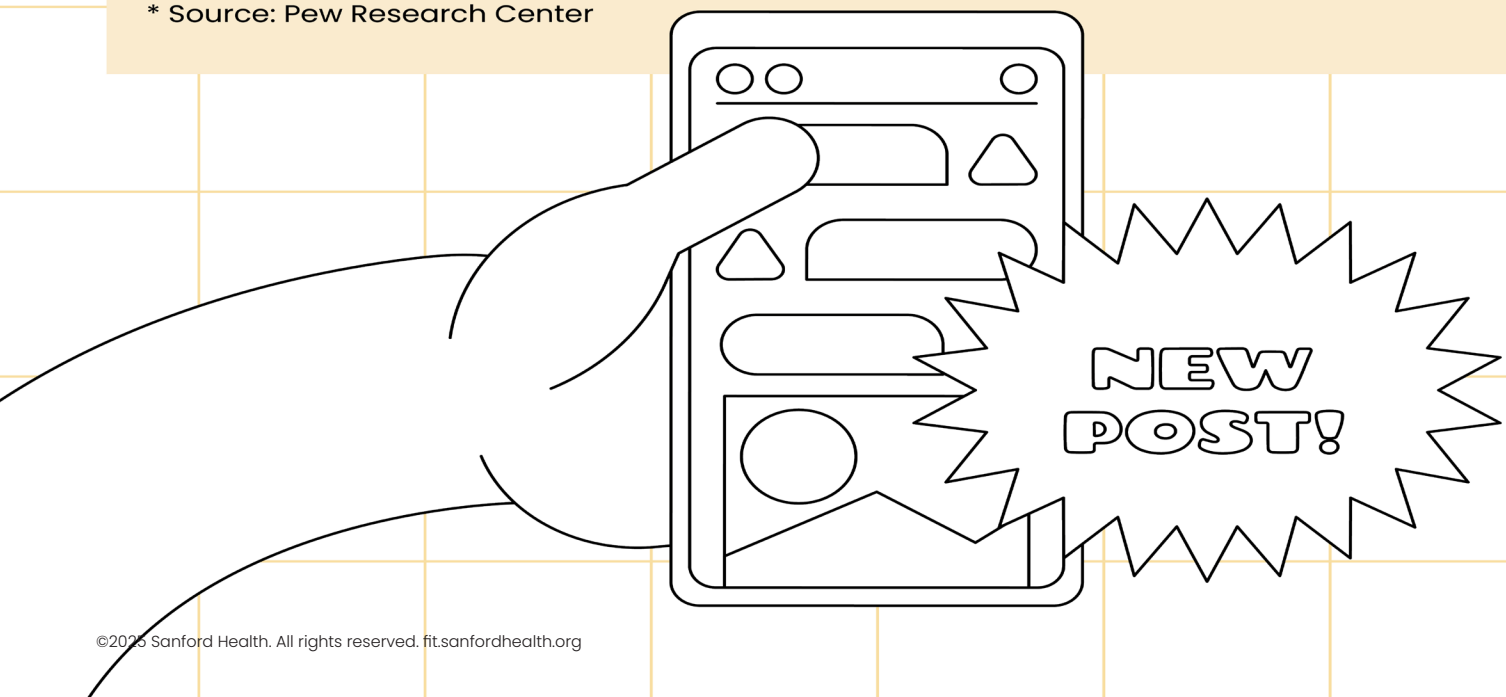
If you're a teenager navigating life today, there's a good chance you're already a bit of an expert when it comes to social media — up to 95% of teens in the U.S. report using at least one social media platform.*

But just to make sure we're all on the same page, here's a quick definition: **Social media** refers to websites and apps that allow users to create and share content.

The good news is that there are healthy ways to use social media. After all, social media can be a great place to expand your social network, communicate with friends and family across the world, and share your creativity.

The not-so-good news is that there are also risks to consider when using social media. Using social media too much, comparing your life to the "perfect" lives you see on screen, or relying solely on social media to build relationships can negatively impact your mental health.

* Source: Pew Research Center



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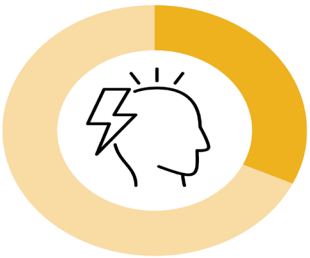
SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF-IMAGE

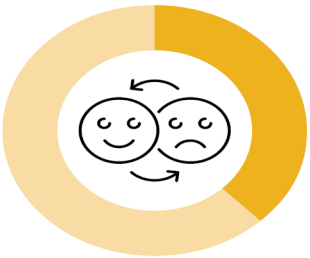
Spending too much time on social media doesn't just take time away from building personal relationships and pursuing your passions — it can actually distort your view of reality and your view of yourself.

Scrolling through endless pictures of "perfect" (that is, highly curated and often staged) lives may lead you to believe that everyone else has life all figured out, but that's not the case. People can edit away their imperfections, and they don't tend to share the negative parts of their lives.

Remember that you don't have the full picture of everyone's picture-perfect life. Take what you see with a grain of salt, and take a break from the screen when you need one.

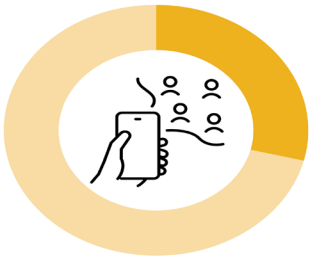


32% of teens say social media has had a mostly negative impact on people their age.



38% of teens say that what they see on social media makes them feel overwhelmed because of all the drama.

Roughly three in ten (**31%**) say it makes them feel like their friends are leaving them out of things.



29% feel pressure to post content that will get lots of comments or likes.

23% say that what they see on social media makes them feel worse about their own life.

* Source: Pew Research Center

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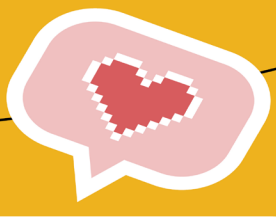
TIPS FOR HEALTHY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Spread positivity and shine for who you truly are by living authentically online and in person.



Limit your screentime

Most phones and tablets have convenient settings that allow you to set a time limit for different apps. When your time is up, turn off the screen.

Follow positive accounts

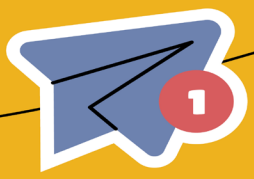
Choose to follow accounts that promote positivity or spark your creativity.

Unfollow negative accounts

These don't have to be accounts that openly spread negativity — if seeing the same person's "perfect" life over and over again makes you feel inadequate, it's okay to unfollow them.

Fact-check what you see

If something looks too good (or too bad) to be true, try verifying it with a trusted news source before you believe it.



Think before you post

It can be tempting to overshare online. Before you post, remember that the internet is permanent. If what you want to share is unkind, untrue, or unhelpful, don't post it.

Check in with yourself

Notice how you're feeling while engaging with social media. Have scheduled downtime away from social media (dinner, extracurricular activities, and school).

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SOCIAL MEDIA DETOX

A “social media detox” is a set period of time during which you limit or pause your social media use.

It can be a great way to reset and refocus your energy on the other things in your life that bring you joy.

Note: You can choose how you want to go about your social media detox. If fully cutting yourself off from the apps feels like a bit too much, you can:

- Limit your social media use to an hour or so a day.
- Take a break from just one specific app.
- Only use social media during certain times of the day.

HOW TO DO A SOCIAL MEDIA DETOX

Step 1: Plan

- Determine how long you’re going to take a break from social media.
- Figure out if you want to step away from all social media apps or just one.

Step 2: Set a goal

- Use the time you’re not spending on social media to chase a specific, achievable goal. Read a book, learn something new, finish a drawing, or focus on mindfulness.

Step 3: Tell someone about your detox

- Sharing your plans with someone creates accountability. If you communicate with your friends online, you can also tell them that you’re taking a break.

Step 4: Delete the apps from your phone or tablet

- Deleting an app from your phone or tablet won’t get rid of your account — you can always redownload and log back in! During your detox, it can be helpful to remove these distractions and temptations from your home screen.

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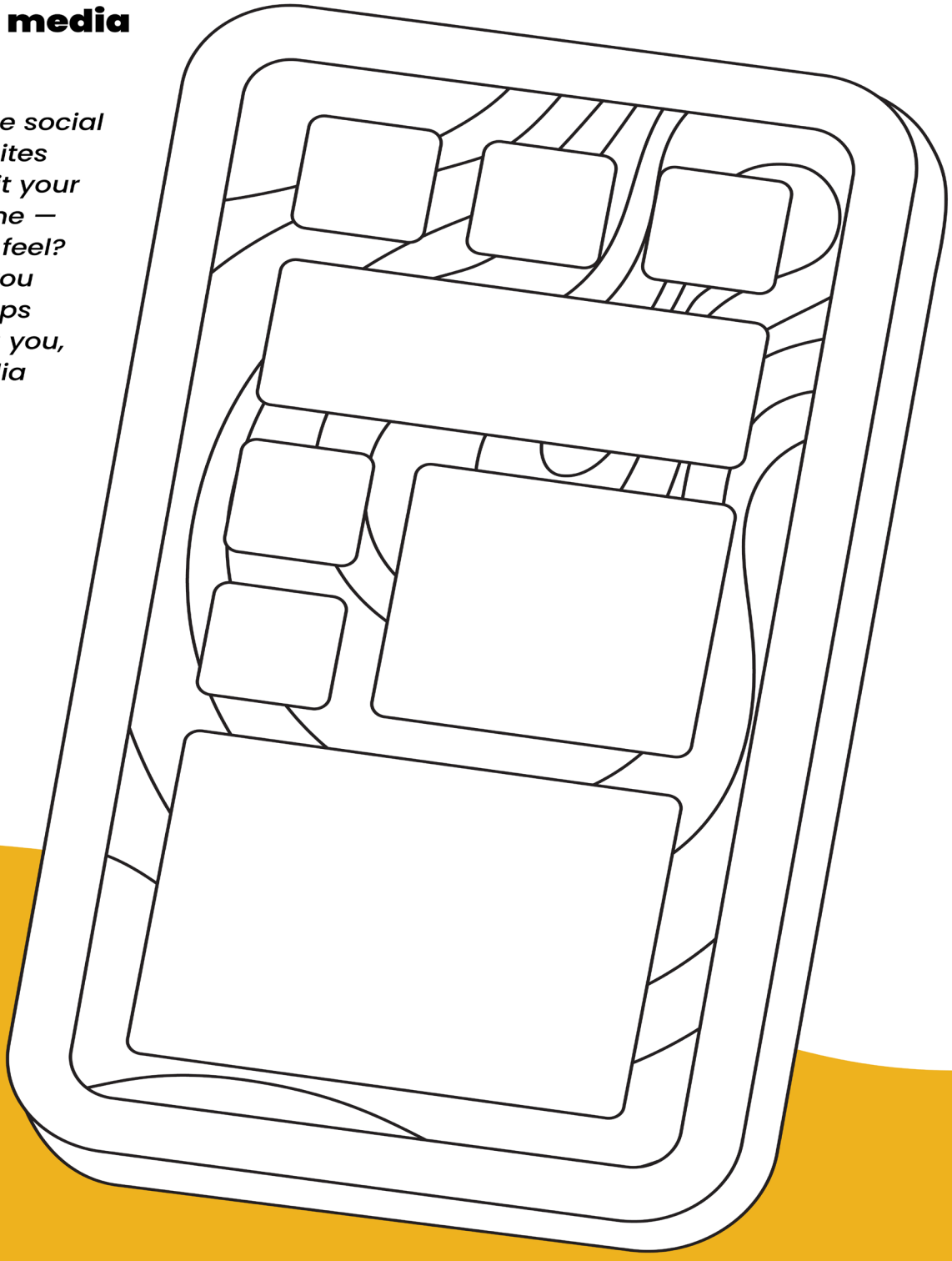
MY THOUGHTS MATTER

Free your mind and let the truth flow. Write down (or draw!) your answers to the following questions, and remember: There are no wrong answers.

How does social media make you feel?

Write down a few of the social media apps and websites you use. Honestly audit your feelings about each one — how does it make you feel? Why do you use it? If you find that any of the apps aren't actually helping you, try doing a social media detox or scaling back.



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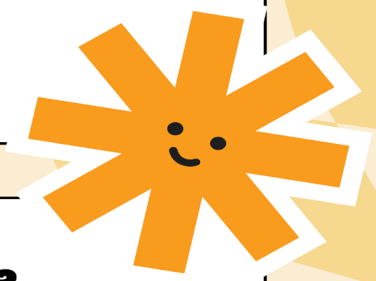
Why do you log on to social media?

What are you looking for when you open a social media app? Do you look forward to seeing your friend's posts, getting creative inspiration, or checking in with your favorite content creator? Is it possible to stop scrolling after you've gotten what you needed out of checking social media?



What do you like to do outside of social media?

Jot down some of your favorite activities that take you away from your phone screen. People often turn to social media out of boredom, so take a peek at the list you wrote next time you reflexively reach for your phone! You might find something that feels more worthwhile.

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SAFETY REMINDER

Protect yourself online by staying alert and setting smart boundaries. Here's how:

Keep your info private

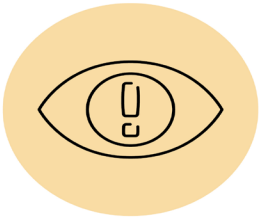
Never share your full name, address, school, phone number, or location in posts or bios. Turn off location services for apps when you don't need them.

Lock down your accounts

Use strong, unique passwords and turn on two-factor authentication. Keep your profiles set to private so only people you know can see what you share.

Don't trust strangers

Be cautious of friend requests or DMs from people you don't know, even if they seem your age. Scammers and fake accounts often pretend to be someone they're not.



Watch out for red flags

If someone asks for personal photos, wants to move the conversation to another app, or pressures you to meet in person, block and report them.

Talk to someone you trust

If something makes you uncomfortable or feels off, don't handle it alone. Reach out to a parent, teacher, or another trusted adult.

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