

Five Essential Steps to Making Social Media Work for You

We know the benefits and costs of social media. We recognize that we cannot control what is posted and blasted all over on the internet. We can also recognize that we are the ones that can decide our purpose in utilizing it, how long we stay on each app or site, and how we respond to what we see and read. However, when you have a persevering habit, it can be difficult to resist your daily *doomscrolling*.

Words are a wonderful means of communication. Our ability to communicate provides great advantages over other species in the world. At the same time, our capacity to link meaning to words according to our experiences can also get us stuck in a labyrinth of emotions when we engage in social media.

When you struggle with anxiety and other difficult feelings, words and the meaning you attach to them can get your anxiety and other feelings to go through the roof. It is important to maintain a flexible mentality so that social media can work FOR YOU instead of against you.

1. Notice

Take a minute to scan your body from head to toe. Be curious and notice your face, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, stomach, legs, and feet. Acknowledge any tension and/or discomfort in any area of your body. Note what your mind is saying. Doing so will enhance your self-awareness of how you are doing before going online.

2. Engage

Set a timer for 15-20 minutes. Begin your internet activity. When the alarm goes off, take a break to scan your body again and notice if anything has changed within your body and mind. Mindfully make a note of it. Then, go back online. Notice your internal events (e.g., thoughts, memories, evaluations, feelings, sensations, and urges) before, during, and after long sessions.

3. Be aware of your “why”

Think about your reasons for engaging in your social media apps. Is it work related, information seeking or for connection purposes? Do you use it as a distraction? If so, what are you avoiding and why? Is it to find relaxation? Is it working for you? Have you noticed if it becomes a source of distress, anxiety or creates a depressed mood? When you decide to follow someone on social media, why are you making that choice?

4. Keep a tally or log

Is the urge to look at your phone irresistible? How often do you have the urge to check your email and other apps on your phone? Do you act on the urge and why? Keep a simple tally for three days. Log in the times of the day you go online and why. What apps provide you with joy and relaxation? What sites or apps provide you with tension, anxiety, doubt, anger or frustration?

5. Make adjustments

- Do you need to modify some things such as the duration and frequency you spend on the internet?
- Is social media bringing purpose to your life?
- Are you utilizing the apps that truly connect you with people?
- Would you like to “hide” or delete some of the apps that are getting in the way of what matters most to you?
- Are you willing to turn the notifications on your smart phone off and recognize the difference it makes in your stress level?
- What other changes would you like to make?

You don't need to have an all-or-nothing attitude about the changes you decide to make. Just take one small step at a time to become more flexible with your social media use. As you do, you will notice real life more and enjoy it in real time!