

Finding a Balance

Real Versus Virtual Life

Passive browsing of social networking sites can make users envious of other people's online personas, real or carefully crafted, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy. Appreciate the distinction between real life and virtual life. Our "virtual life" is just a part of something greater: our real life. One of the main causes of nomophobia is the idea of giving the 'virtual' life experience a status, which may be equal or even greater than what we experience in our "real" life. One needs to disconnect from 'constructed' identities. We all feel we need to develop online and have the confidence of being who one really is. The "fear of missing out" or FOMO can be a strong driver, especially when others in school or friends circle share images on social networks and create a strong pull to be part of the 'in' crowd.

Using technology in a reasonable way will improve the quality of our lives instead of enslaving us. The following are some good practices that we need to integrate into our lives.

Moderation

- Balance the time spent online with other activities, like school assignments, social interactions and outdoor activities.
- Set limits for the time spent on mobiles, laptops, desktops and tablets to enable us to do other important things and lead a balanced and fulfilling life. It is difficult to say how much is too much. We can show responsible use of our time and good judgement by regulating and balancing your time use sensibly.
- Putting a limit on the information that we receive helps us in processing and using the information we already have, and identify what more information we need to acquire. Frequently, messaging applications offer us the option to remove the features that can create so much anxiety. Use them, we do not need to spend all day wondering about what someone else is doing.
- Be very selective while installing applications on the mobile phone. An endless number of apps (especially for social networking) can tempt us into excessive use. While communication options multiply, a person suffering from nomophobia needs to feed their addiction even more.

Digital Detox

- In order to feel liberated, try a technology fast every month, during which you spend an entire day or more without gadgets.
- Turn off mobile phones and engage in face-to-face conversations and interaction with people or solitude daily.
- Find certain moments to disconnect yourself from devices. Switching off gadgets while having meals and before sleeping, and setting gadget free time slots for each day can help balance usage.
- Place your phone at least 15 feet away from you before going to sleep at night. Keep it on silent and resist the temptation to check it before the morning.

Sharing problems and seeking solutions

Talking about the problem is the first step towards solving it. If something upsets us online or we are worried about a friend it can really help to talk to someone. There are many people who can help you, such as your friends, family members and teachers. If we keep our worries to ourselves, they can grow. It is a lot easier to solve a problem when two heads work together. Often, we do not talk to our friends or parents about the things we would like to because we feel embarrassed, shy or ashamed. A good friend will not laugh at us, judge us, or put us down. They will listen, try to understand and try to help us feel better or find a solution. They may know more about the problems or may have had similar experiences. We can seek advice from a trusted adult if something has upset us or made us uncomfortable when online. It is important that this person has a certain level of knowledge and sensitivity. It could be school counsellors or teachers or a trusted school staff as they should be able to answer our questions and provide guidance and assistance.

Professional expertise is available, although not everywhere, to assist with various problems related with misuse or excessive use of digital devices and technologies.

Open discussions and family agreements

Although the risk of abuse online is clearly serious, the capacity of most users to protect themselves is often under-estimated. Open and informed discussions with family members about the internet and associated risks can be the best defence against online grooming and bullying.

For young users, parents often seek the security of their children but they should not be snooping, which can leave them feeling untrusted and increase the risk of self-harm. Ideally, a family agreement is a good way to start a conversation with the whole family about how everyone will use the internet and discuss together how to behave in a positive way when online at home, at school or at a friend's house.