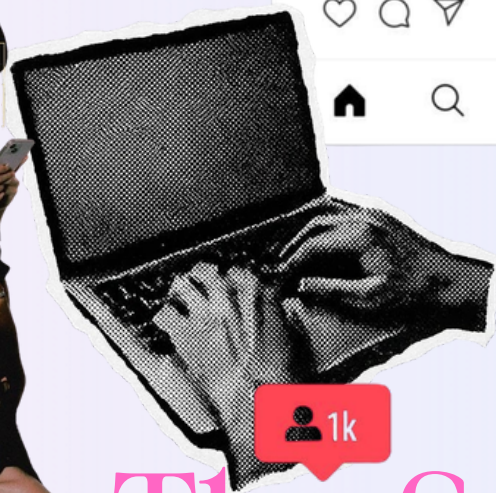
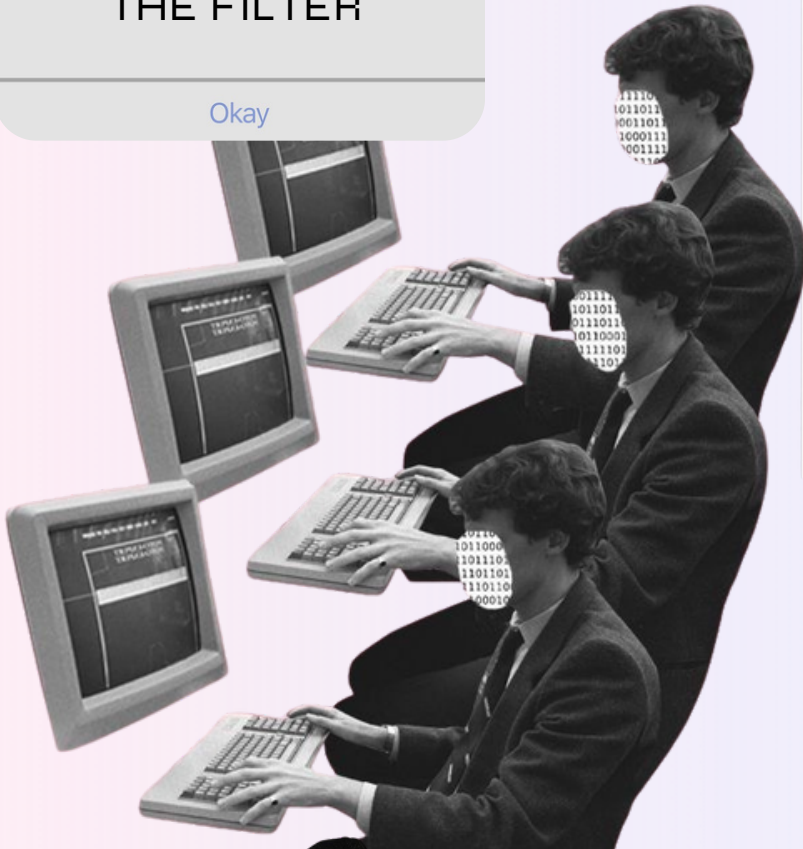
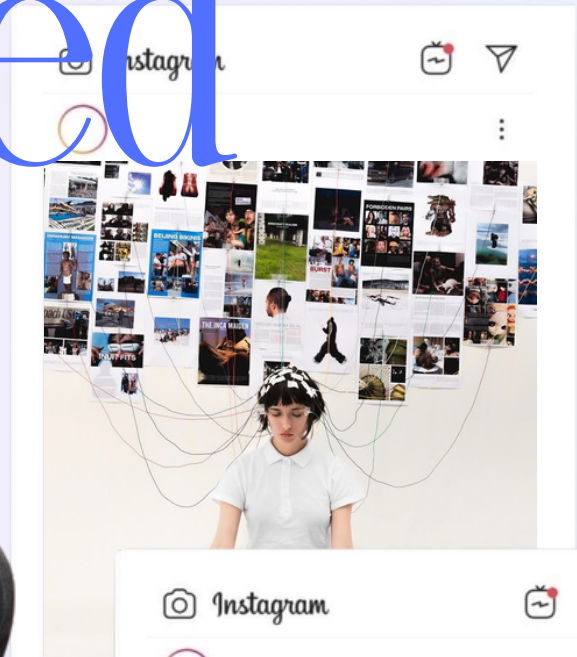


Unfiltered

Reminder

LOOK BEYOND
THE FILTER

Okay



The Social Media Guide

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE



01 | TALK TO SOMEONE

Speak to someone you trust, such as a friend, family member, teacher, or health professional.

02 | CHECK THE SOURCE

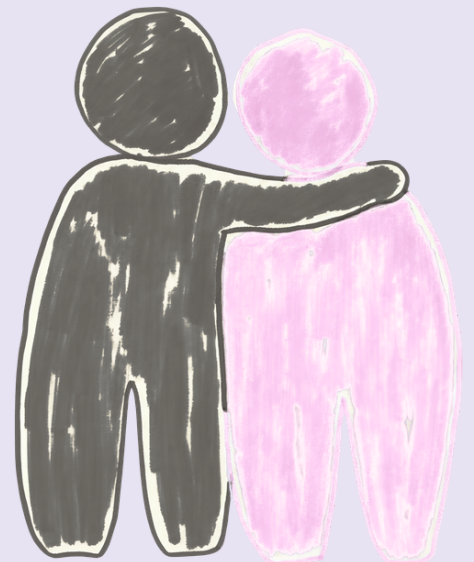
Don't rely on social media for health advice. Check reliable sources such as the NHS or specialist organisations.

03 | ASK FOR SUPPORT

You can speak to a GP, health centre or youth service if you're struggling. You don't have to wait until things get worse.

04 | KNOW YOUR PRIVACY

Ask a health professional how confidentiality works. Knowing what stays private can make asking for help easier.



The Contents Page

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How social media creates unrealistic expectations and comparison

02 | Can You See Through the Filter?

Spot the pressure, question the feed, and recognise what isn't real

03 | Effects of Misinformation

How false information can influence what we believe

04 | Reality Check

Debunking the myths believed by many

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How algorithms learn what we like and keeps us scrolling

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How social media can affect our mental well-being

08 | Protect Your Mental Health

Simple ways to build healthier habits online

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Real quotes from teens, giving advice and their own experiences

11 | Safe Space

Sites to visit for support

12 | What do the Professionals Say?

Quotes from Professionals about mental health

The Perfection Trap

Social media sells perfection. Here's what it doesn't show.

Behind every flawless selfie is carefully a chosen moment. Social media is full of perfect faces, perfect bodies and perfect lives, but what we see online is rarely the full story. As the pressure to meet unrealistic standards grows, more young people are finding themselves trapped in a cycle of comparison, self-doubt and the pursuit of perfection. Filters, editing apps and carefully selected highlights can make ordinary lives seem extraordinary, creating unrealistic expectations of what people should look like or achieve. Over time, this constant exposure can affect confidence, increase anxiety and make it difficult to appreciate reality for what it is.



Comparison starts with a scroll. Social media often shows edited moments rather than reality.

The Highlight Reel Effect

Have you ever scrolled through social media and felt like everyone else's life looks better than yours? This is known as the highlight reel effect. Most people only post the best moments of their lives, such as holidays, achievements, celebrations and edited selfies. They rarely share the difficult moments, making their lives appear happier and more perfect than they really are.

As we scroll through these carefully selected posts, it's easy to forget that we're comparing our everyday lives to someone else's highlights. Over time, this can lead to unrealistic expectations and make people feel like they are not attractive, successful or interesting enough. Instead of feeling inspired, many young people begin to question their own appearance, achievements and self-worth.

**"They only show the good days, never the bad days, which makes people think they are doing things wrong."
— survey respondent**

Survey Snapshot

76%

of respondents believe influencers create unrealistic expectations about appearance, lifestyle or success.

33 respondents

took part in the Beyond The Filter survey.

Can You See Through the Filter?

When scrolling starts changing how we see ourselves.



01 / MYTH OR FACT?

Question the feed.

MYTH If it's on social media, it's real.

Answer: filters, edits and selected moments create a version of reality, not reality itself.

MYTH Everyone else looks perfect online.

Answer: most posts are carefully chosen, lit and edited. You're seeing the highlight reel, not the full story.

MYTH I need to look like that to be accepted.

Answer: real acceptance comes from being yourself, not matching an unrealistic standard.

03 / QUICK CHECK-IN

How trapped are you in the scroll?

1. You see someone who looks "perfect" online. Your first thought is...

- "I wish I looked like that."
- "What filter are they using?"
- "Good for them, anyway."

2. You've been scrolling for an hour. You feel...

- Better than when I started
- Exactly the same
- Worse / comparing myself more

02 / SPOT THE PRESSURE

Notice the signs.

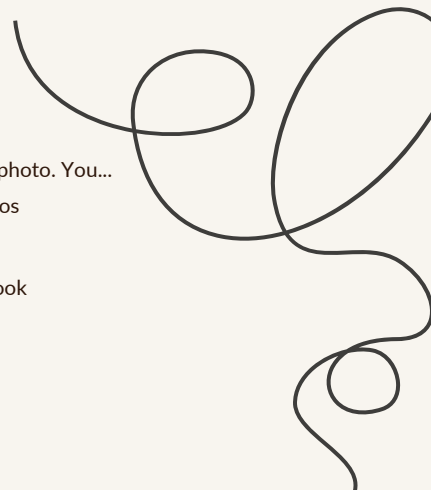
- ☐ I compare my body to influencers.
- ☐ I feel bad after scrolling for a while.
- ☐ I edit my photos to look a certain way.
- ☐ I worry about not getting enough likes.
- ☐ I feel like I'm not good enough.

3. Your friend posts an amazing photo. You...

- Compare it to your own photos
- Like it and keep scrolling
- Wonder how many takes it took

YOUR RESULT

A few comparison-style answers may mean the feed is turning the pressure up. More filter-aware answers can mean you're noticing what's edited. More neutral answers can suggest you're keeping some distance from the scroll.



Social media can be used to inform people about recent news or events that have happened, although it can also cause misinformation.

Effects of misinformation

Influence Decisions/Opinions

Misinformation can influence people's opinions on topics such as politics, health, clothing and past or current events. For example, someone may be influenced to buy certain brands because they are more popular. If they cannot afford or do not have these brands, they may feel left out, insecure or socially isolated as they may not feel that they do not fit in with others/friends.



Spreads and Normalises stereotypes

Misinformation can spread stereotypes about certain people or groups. So, when these stereotypes are repeatedly shown it can influence how people see or treat said groups. In some cases it may even promote people to say derogatory words. This eventually can become normalised, as a result more and more people will say and believe these stereotypes.



Lose trust in information

Misinformation can lead to a loss of trust as people may believe something which turns out to be false. This makes people question the reliability of the information that comes from social media. This can cause confusion, stress and anxiety. It may also make people feel overwhelmed as they don't know what resources are reliable.



1

FAKE

Reality Check

Aesthetic feeds are just harmless fun

Creating and viewing aesthetically perfect content can be enjoyable but constantly comparing your life, appearance or surroundings to carefully curated posts can create unrealistic standards



Cyber bullying isn't as serious as bullying in real life

Online comments and messages can still have a significant emotional impact. The fact that they're happening through a screen doesn't make them harmless



Deleting a post means nobody saw it.

Once something is shared online, other people may have already viewed, saved or captured it.

4

You can always tell when something is fake online

Not anymore. filters, editing, AI- generated content and carefully staged posts can make it increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from what has been constructed to get views.

5

Social media doesn't affect your attention span.

Constantly switching between short pieces of content can encourage a habit of seeking quick stimulation and make sustained attention feel more difficult.

6

Having your phone nearby doesn't affect you if you're not using it.

Constant access to notifications and social media can make it harder to fully disconnect and focus on what's happening around you.



DON'T JUST SCROLL. QUESTION IT.

The Predatory Algorithm

It's watching and
learning

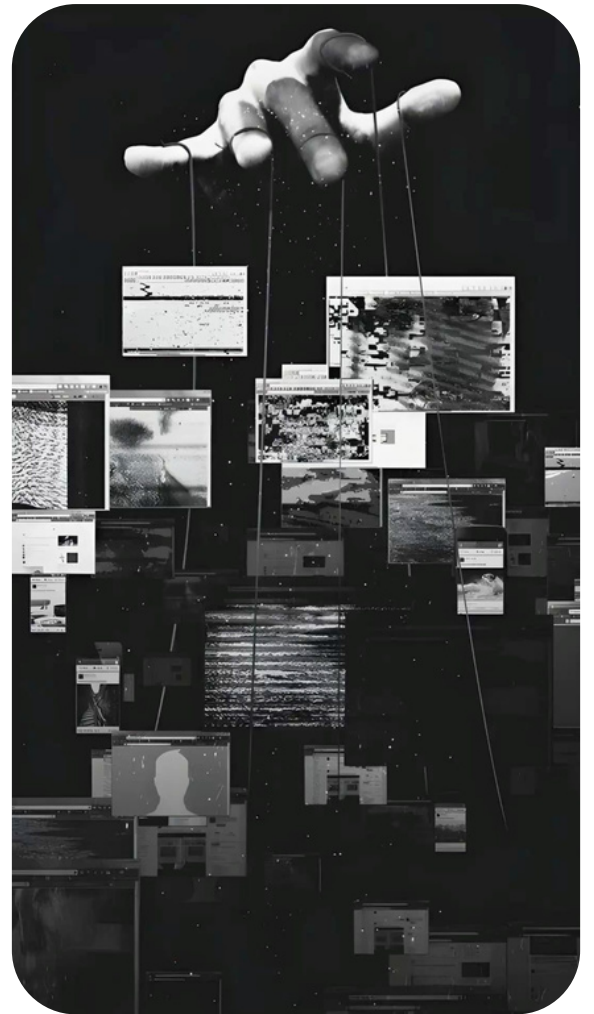
Have you ever been talking about something with your friends, whether it's a new product or a meme, and then moments later, it appears on your feed? This is not a coincidence. It's the algorithm.

The social media algorithm is a machine learning model that takes in your data, such as the media you interact with or your search history, to recommend new content that you are likely to enjoy. The algorithm pushes content that aligns with your beliefs and interests to keep you engaged, while hiding content that doesn't. This creates a filter bubble, similar to an echo chamber.

This is a very toxic environment. Young, impressionable minds are being fed their own beliefs

and opinions without being exposed to opposing arguments. This can result in radical behaviours and misinformation due to confirmation bias. Filter bubbles play a big role in the information we receive. A study in 2016 found that algorithms play an important role in whether helplines and similar searches are shown to those struggling with mental health and suicidal thoughts.

While the idea of only receiving content curated for you may seem efficient, it creates a greater divide. It prevents curiosity and learning. People can no longer stumble across a new concept or discover a new viewpoint. Instead, people's beliefs remain stagnant and become stronger through social media and its algorithm.



You receive recommendations based on your interests, as well as people from your area with the same backgrounds, viewpoints and experiences.

One of the main reasons why social media is used is communication. Never have we been able to talk to so many people from so many different places. So why is it that we don't really see people who are different from us?

Social media becomes a reflection of who you are. Just a look at someone's feed could tell you so much. Rather than expressing yourself through words or art, it is shown through a simple click.

But what happens when everyone is trying to create the same version of themselves? Social media has created an obsession with aesthetics. Everything has to look perfect. The perfect room, the perfect outfit, the perfect meal, the perfect life. Even something as simple as taking a picture can become about whether it fits the aesthetic of your feed. Instead of posting what we enjoy, we start posting what we think will look good to other people.

This creates another form of conformity. Trends spread quickly, and suddenly everyone is listening to the same music, wearing the same clothes and taking the same pictures. Individuality becomes difficult when everyone is being shown the same content and encouraged to recreate it. But the algorithm does not just show us content created by real people.



Content farms produce large amounts of content designed to gain views and engagement. The quality does not necessarily matter. What matters is whether people will click, watch and interact. The more content that is produced, the harder it becomes to distinguish what is genuine from what is simply designed to keep us online. This leads into the idea of the Dead Internet Theory. The theory suggests that a large amount of the internet is no longer created by



real people, but by bots and artificial intelligence. While the theory itself is not proven, the increasing amount of automated and repetitive content raises an interesting question: how much of what we see online is actually human?

If the algorithm decides what we see, and content is being created to satisfy the algorithm, then who are we really creating content for?

Social media was created to connect people. Yet the more advanced it becomes, the more artificial it can feel. We are surrounded by content, but not necessarily by real people. We are constantly being shown what is popular, what is trending and what we should like.

The algorithm learns what keeps us watching, and we learn what the algorithm wants us to become.

Maybe the most dangerous part is that we do not always notice it happening.

CONSTANT COMPARISON

You feel worse about yourself after scrolling

☐

SEEKING CONSTANT VALIDATION

Your mood depends on likes and comments

☐

ANXIETY & RESTLESSNESS

You feel uneasy when away from your phone

☐

WITHDRAWAL FROM REAL LIFE

Online interactions replace face-to-face ones

LOSS OF FOCUS

You struggle to concentrate without checking feeds

Social Media & Mental Health

FEAR OF MISSING OUT

Others' posts trigger envy or inadequacy

☐

SLEEP DISRUPTION

Checking your phone keeps you up at night

☐

SET BOUNDARIES

Limit your screen time and set daily app limits

☐

TAKE REGULAR BREAKS

Step away from your phone and take time offline

☐

CONNECT IN REAL LIFE

Spend quality time with friends and family face-to-face

☐

Protect your Mental Health

TALK ABOUT IT

Share how you feel with someone you trust

☐

CURATE YOUR FEED

Follow uplifting accounts and unfollow negativity

☐

DO THINGS YOU ENJOY

Engage in hobbies and activities that make you feel good

☐

PRACTISE SELF-CARE

Look after your body, mind and mental wellbeing

☐

SEEK HELP IF NEEDED

It's okay to ask for support from a professional

☐

we asked teens

Quotes from our survey

less unrealistic
expectations

restrict certain things
for younger age groups

What is one
thing you
would change
about social
media?

Make it more honest

Do you think social media controls
teenagers or vice versa?

Social media controls
teenagers as it seems like their
life is on a show and pressure
is on them to seem perfect and
fit in to the unrealistic
standards

Both, I think it began by
social media controlling
teenages because they saw
how people looked and
how they acted and now
some teenagers themselves
post these same videos and
affect other teenagers

Controls teenagers through social
pressure and teenagers fearing
being shamed on socials

You are your own person, don't feel pressured bc everything you see is shown in an unrealistic way

Don't let others set expectations for you

Experiment with activities in the community to be able to find people who you can be yourself with, it can take a while to find what makes you feel satisfied

just be yourself because not everything on social media is true

What advice would you give to someone who feels pressured by unrealistic expectations on social media?

Remember that social media often shows a filtered version of reality. Avoid comparing yourself to others, follow positive and realistic accounts, focus on your own goals, and spend time on real-life activities that build confidence and happiness

anyone can fake it till they make it!!

take care

be real

Take a break! You'll miss it first then realise life is better without it

Just don't bother with it

Safe Spaces



www.mind.org.uk



www.kooth.com

childline

www.childline.org.uk



www.brook.org.uk

YOUNGMiNDS

www.youngminds.org.uk

SAMARITANS

www.dawnwalk.samaritans.org



THEIR ADVICE

DON'T GOOGLE IT. ASK.

One of the biggest messages from our conversations was to speak up instead of struggling in silence.

If something online worries you, ask someone you trust or speak to a health professional. You might get a clearer answer than anything an algorithm puts on your feed.

“Go to the actual reliable source.”

ONLINE PRESSURE

“Is what you’re seeing actually real?”

The professionals highlighted how easily social media can affect confidence. Constant comparison, edited images and unrealistic expectations can make young people feel like they aren’t good enough.

They also warned that seeing health advice online doesn’t make it reliable. Always question where the information came from.

WHAT THEY DO

More than just a job.

The professionals we spoke to work directly with young people, helping them understand their health, answer questions and find the right support. Their roles are different, but they all have one thing in common: listening to young people without judgement.

 Their message: asking questions is part of looking after yourself.

DID YOU KNOW?

**YOU DON'T NECESSARILY HAVE
TO BE 16 TO ASK FOR SUPPORT.**

GETTING SUPPORT

You can ask for help before it gets serious.

GPs, health centres, youth services and other organisations are there to support young people. You don’t need to have everything figured out before asking for help.

Understanding confidentiality can also make it easier to speak honestly about things you might not feel comfortable sharing elsewhere.

What do the professionals say?

We spoke to healthcare professionals about social media, mental health and getting support.

“Go to the actual/original reliable source.”

Find the digital version of our
magazine here.



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