



ScrollSafe for teens

10 tips to stay smart
on social media



Department
of Education

origen

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Social media
is a huge part
of everyday life –
especially for
teens.





It's where we connect, create, learn, and express ourselves. But sometimes, it can get overwhelming, or even mess with our mood and wellbeing.

That's where ScrollSafe comes in. Created with input from young people and developed by Orygen – a world-leading youth mental health organisation – this guide is packed with practical tips to help you stay smart, safe and in control of your social media use.

It's not about quitting social media. It's about learning how to use it in a way that actually works for you.



1 Navigating the social scene

Social media isn't just something we use – it's kind of where we live.

It's where we chat, share, scroll, laugh, cry, and sometimes accidentally spend two hours just... **scrolling.**



And you're not alone in that – around 97% of Australian teens use social media daily, with almost half using it for more than 3 hours per day. That's like half a casual work shift, every day, on your phone.

But here's the thing: socials aren't always a neutral space and some content can seriously affect your mental wellbeing, self-esteem and sense of reality.

That's why it's so important to be **in control of your scroll.**

So, how can you tell when social media is messing with your day or mood?

Keep an eye out for these signs:

- you spend more time online than you mean to
- you log off feeling low, anxious or on edge
- it's getting in the way of school, work or real-life relationships
- you get hit with FOMO when scrolling
- you feel like you need to check it constantly



How does social media make you feel?

Think about the last time you were on social media. What emotions did you experience?

2 Finding balance on social media



Despite what you might've heard, social media **isn't all good,** and **isn't all bad.**

The reality sits somewhere in between. It can lift you up and bring you down (sometimes, all in the same scroll).

So, let's start with what social media can be great for, such as:

- keeping in touch with friends and family, no matter where they are
- finding new interests, mastering new skills, and staying in the loop
- sharing your thoughts, art, memes, and passions with the world
- joining groups where you feel seen and supported

But it's not all sunshine and serotonin (the brain's feel-good chemical). There are a few challenges too, like:

- constantly comparing yourself to others
- feeling overwhelmed by the sheer amount of content
- notifications that pull your attention in 100 different directions
- feeling unsure about what's being shared, seen, or saved
- hurtful comments or messages that stick with you longer than you'd like
- the risk of being exposed to traumatising content or harmful interactions (like grooming, catfishing, and sexual extortion)

It's about finding a balance. That means using social media in a way that adds to your life instead of draining it.

“

Social media has helped me connect with people who get me, and that's been really cool. But I've also had moments where I realised I've been scrolling for two hours and feel empty. For me, it's about knowing when to unplug and log off.

”



What positives does social media bring to your life?
How do these experiences make you feel?

3 What are your social media triggers?



Whether it's someone's seemingly perfect life reel, a heated political post, or a random comment that stays with you all day, it's totally normal to feel thrown off.

These experiences don't mean you're weak. They mean you're human.

You're not alone. Lots of people feel impacted by what they see online and those feelings are 100% valid.

“
Political posts online really get under my skin. I've learned that certain topics trigger big reactions in me, so I set limits on what I engage with.
”

Try a trigger tracker

One way to understand your online patterns is by tracking your reactions to what you see. Use your notes app or a notepad to jot down:

- what you saw
- how it made you feel
- what you did next
- what helped you cope

Over time, this helps you notice trends and build your own go-to strategies that work.

If it's harming you, report it

If you come across harmful or upsetting content, it's important that you don't just scroll past it. Instead, report it.

Helpful links

- Online safety | eSafety Commissioner
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/>
- Young People | eSafety Commissioner
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people>
- Report online harm
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/report>

“

I used to spiral every time I saw luxury travel posts. It made me feel behind in life. Now I pause and remind myself it's just one highlight, not the whole picture.

”



Have you ever muted or unfollowed someone for your mental health?

4 Be the boss of your online experience



We all know how easy it is to get lost in the scroll – whether it’s catching up with friends, discovering something new, or just passing time.

But sometimes, we’re so caught up in seeing what will pop up next, we forget to check in with how it’s actually making us feel.

Being **intentional** with your social media use can help you stay grounded and in control. It’s not about being perfect, just being more aware of how and why you’re using it.

So, let's kick off with a simple pre-scroll check-in:



Think before you post

Before hitting share, ask yourself:

- Will I still feel good about this post next week?
- Am I sharing this to connect – or just hoping for likes?
- How might this make others feel?



Check your emotional state

Check-in with yourself and ask:

- How am I feeling right now?
- Am I feeling stressed, anxious, or vulnerable?
- If I'm not feeling great, is social media really the best thing for me right now?



Regularly give yourself permission to disconnect

Remember:

- You don't have to be connected 24/7
- Try setting a boundary like no socials after 8pm, or a weekend scroll detox
- Turn off notifications when you need to focus or relax
- Schedule time for offline activities you enjoy (for example, reading, running, baking, spending time in nature)

Remember, building these habits takes time, so be patient with yourself and keep practicing!



5 Algorithms and your emotions



Social media platforms use algorithms to decide what shows up in your feed.

These algorithms aren't neutral. They're carefully designed to keep you scrolling by grabbing your attention and keeping you on the app for as long as possible.

And guess what tends to do that best?

Big emotions.

That's why you might see more content that makes you feel angry, shocked, jealous, or even outraged.

This kind of emotionally charged content is often called **rage bait**. It gets people fired up, clicking, commenting, and sharing. And every second you spend interacting with it? That's money in the platform's pocket.

So, how does this affect you?

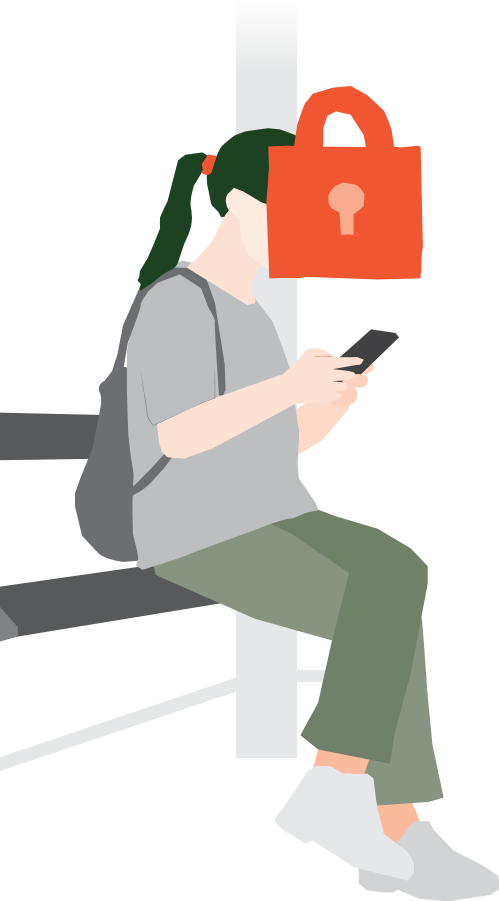
- You might feel worse after scrolling – anxious, insecure, or overwhelmed – without knowing why
- The algorithm feeds you more content that triggers strong emotions like anger, jealousy, or fear
- You can get stuck in a ‘doomscroll’ loop that’s hard to break out of
- It’s easy to forget: your feed is shaped by a system, not a neutral reflection of reality
- But you *can* take control – by muting, unfollowing, or switching to a chronological feed
- Curating your feed to include uplifting or calming content can shift your whole experience
- You deserve a social media space that supports your mental health – not one that drags it down

The more you understand how these systems work, the more power you have to step back, tune in, and choose what you want to engage with.



Have you ever noticed your mood change after engaging with certain types of content? What’s one step you could take to make your feed feel better?

6 Your digital footprint



What you share online can stick around for a long time. And it can shape how people see you, even years down the track.

What are you leaving behind?

Every post, comment, tag, or DM leaves a mark. Together, they form your **digital identity** (basically, your online reputation).

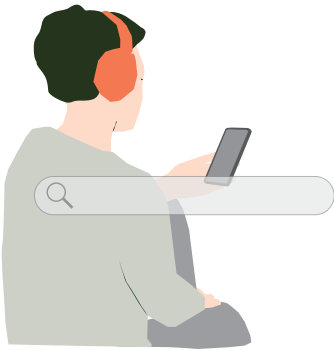
That meme you shared, the fight you commented on, the photos you posted without thinking... they can resurface later. And when they do, they might not represent the person you've become.

Why it matters

Future employers, universities, and even potential friends or partners might Google you. It's not about being fake; it's about being aware.

Some online content can:

- affect job or uni applications
- cause misunderstandings in relationships
- be screenshotted and spread, even if you delete it



Red flags to watch for

Before you post, comment or share, ask yourself:

- Would I be okay with my boss, teacher, or grandparent seeing this?
- Am I acting out of anger, boredom, or trying to impress someone?
- Could this be misunderstood out of context?

How to manage your online presence

It's never too late to do a little digital spring cleaning:

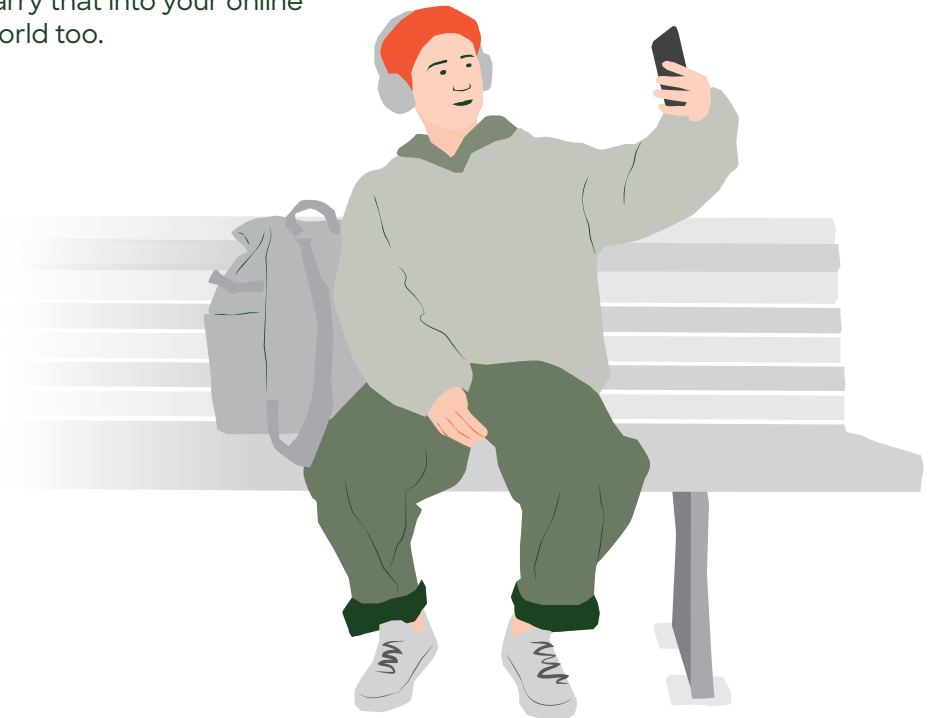
- **Google yourself** to see what comes up and how you appear to the outside world
- **Delete or hide old posts** that no longer reflect who you are
- **Update privacy settings** to control who sees your content
- **Unfollow or leave groups** that don't align with your values



If someone only saw your online profile, what would they think you're like?
Is that the story you want to tell?

7 Posting with intention

Imagine your social media presence as an extension of your real-life self. Your values and beliefs are the same. If you try to be a decent person in real life, it makes sense to carry that into your online world too.



Before you hit like, share, comment or post, try checking in with yourself for a sec. Ask:



Does this line up with who I am and what I believe in?

How does it make me feel?

Would you feel comfortable sharing it with a friend, family member or colleague?

Is the information reliable?

Ready to put these skills into action?

Check out the MOST app with tips and strategies to help you master mindful social media use. It has go-to info for scrolling smarter and feeling better!

Check out MOST



Remember: it's not about curating a "perfect" profile. It's just about making sure your online presence actually reflects you. **The real you.**





8 Wait – is that even true?



It's never been easier to find information online but not all of it is helpful, and some of it can even be harmful.

From trending 'health hacks' to political takes and lifestyle advice, there's a lot of content out there that looks convincing but isn't always based on facts.

Sometimes it's unintentional (**misinformation**). Other times, it's on purpose (**disinformation**). Either way, it's easy to get swept up in it, especially when it's coming from influencers or creators we trust.

Why it happens

Unfortunately, social media platforms reward content that gets clicks, likes and shares. Not content that's true.

That means eye-catching, controversial, or emotionally charged posts often rise to the top even if they're misleading or flat-out wrong.

Spotting red flags

Not sure if a post is trustworthy?
Ask yourself:

Who's saying it? Are they qualified, or just good at going viral?

Where's it from? Can you find the info on a credible site (like a uni, health org or news outlet)?

Is it emotionally manipulative?
If it's trying to shock, scare or outrage you, it's probably about engagement – not truth.

Does it sound too good to be true?
Promises of instant results or “secret hacks” are major red flags.

“

Sometimes I go down rabbit holes and forget to double-check where the info's actually coming from. It's easy to think, "If a lot of people are sharing it, it must be true".

”



When scrolling becomes too much

Ever feel like you open an app for “just a minute”... and suddenly it’s been an hour? You’re doomscrolling, switching between apps without thinking, feeling tired, but wired.

If you’ve felt like this, you’re not alone.



What's actually happening?

Social media platforms are **designed to hook you.** They work like slot machines for your brain. Each refresh, like, or notification delivers a hit of dopamine (the brain's reward chemical), pulling you into a loop that's hard to break.

This is called a 'dopamine loop', and it's not just a habit. For some people, it can develop into **problematic internet use (PIU)** or even digital addiction.

Signs you might be dealing with PIU:

- Anxious or irritable when you're not online
- Use the internet to escape stress or negative feelings
- Can't stop checking your phone
- Screen time is impacting your mood, sleep, school or relationships

What you can do about it

STEP 1 is recognising the pattern.

STEP 2 is breaking the loop.

STEP 3 is to reach out if things feel like they're getting out of control.

You're not the problem, but you can be the solution

The internet is designed to be addictive. But, that doesn't mean you've failed if you find it hard to unplug.

You are not your screen time. You are not your worst scrolling habit. You are allowed to take a break.



What does a "healthy" relationship with your phone look like to you?

What's one habit you could try changing this week?

10 Your digital wellbeing

Social media can be amazing. It helps us stay connected, inspired, and entertained. But it can also get overwhelming – fast. Building a **digital wellbeing plan** can help ensure social media works **for you,** not against you.



< Notes

Check in with how you're doing

Before you make any changes, get clear on how social media is impacting you.

- How do I usually feel after scrolling?
- Am I comparing myself to others online?
- Do I feel pressure to post, reply, or stay up-to-date?
- Do I ever scroll just because I'm bored or anxious?

Tip: There's no wrong answer. This is just for you.

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Know your triggers

Some types of content can affect us more than others like comparison posts, world events, body image content, or online arguments. Start noticing what tends to get to you and how it shows up in your mood, body, or behaviour.

Try these prompts:

- I usually feel triggered when I see...
- My typical response is to...
- What might help me next time is...

Build your digital wellbeing plan

Build a plan to help you stay in charge of your time online. Use it to set goals, figure out what's working (and what's not), and make sure social media is supporting your mental health.

Download Orygen's Digital wellbeing plan template and answer the prompting questions.

[www.orygen.org.au/
Training/Resources/digital-
technology/ScrollSafe](http://www.orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/digital-technology/ScrollSafe)



Quick grounding toolkit

If social media is getting to you, try one of these:

- Name what you're feeling
- Take a short break from the app
- Journal or voice-note your thoughts
- Do a physical reset: stretch, walk, splash cold water on your face
- Call or text someone you trust

Asking for help

Social media can be a pretty intense place. It's okay to need support.

Need additional support?

MOST connects you with resources, tools, and a community of peers and clinicians who understand what you're going through.



Check out MOST





Below are some places to go for support



Your school wellbeing team or an adult you trust



Your general practitioner (GP)



Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800



Lifeline Australia: 13 11 14



13YARN: 13 92 76



Department of Education mental health and wellbeing toolkit for students

www.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-toolkit



eSafety Commissioner www.esafety.gov.au



headspace www.headspace.org.au



MOST www.most.org.au



If you need urgent help, call Triple Zero (000)

You can visit the Department of Education's Safe Socials website for more info on staying safe online!
www.vic.gov.au/safe-socials

Notes



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[www.orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/
digital-technology/ScrollSafe](http://www.orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/digital-technology/ScrollSafe)



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