

# Online Safety Awareness

Brian Byrne - © Pikes Peak Respite Services 2025

## Introduction

Hello Child and Youth Mentors! There's a chance that you might end up working with a kiddo who is in the "social media age range," and helping them to be safe online would greatly benefit the kiddo and their family. The internet can be crazy, educational, dangerous, fun, and/or scary (which is why this training is so long) and difficult to navigate. There are dangers ranging from seriously questionable dietary advice to hate groups to virtual kidnapping. There are strategies to identify and avoid all of those things and more throughout this training, we hope you enjoy!

## Protecting Your Money

A lot of money can be made online with video games, social media platforms (like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Snapchat), and websites. There are four primary ways to make money online. Money can be made –

- 1) when customers buy products like makeup, clothes, information, or video games
  - 2) with in-game purchases like skins and weapons
  - 3) when people (called *online marketers*) make money selling advertisements on their websites that tempt you to buy something
  - 4) when marketers collect data about website visitors and sell that data to other marketers, data like your name, age, how much money you make, what you like to buy, what sites you visit, how long you stay on the site, etc.
- (GKIS, 2021)

It can be very easy to get pulled into online marketing schemes like this, and I was definitely tricked once or twice when I was a younger person. Online marketers are very talented at making their ads **\*POP\*** and grab your attention, not only that, but they present their product in such a way that makes you feel like you're getting a deal, even if they product is actually full price. Marketers can be very scuzzy and will even try to target their offers towards kiddos who do not know how to spot a sketchy sale. With multiple advertising hubs such as computer games, smartphone games, MP3 players, and websites, companies are spending at least 20 billion dollars on advertising targeting children (GKIS, 2021). How do these advertising agencies trick kids into spending money?

- **Appealing characters** designed to build brand loyalties at an early age.

- **Banners and popups** with lots of color and movement designed to attract and keep the child’s eye.
- **Featured games, puzzles, contests, toys, videos, appealing activities** – all branded – to keep them engaged for lots of exposure to the different marketing strategies that are the seeds of brand recognition designed to grow in years to come.
- **Promises of discounts and extra value** to start *pester power* (the powerful influence of begging kids).
- **Action commands:** BUY NOW, GO NOW, SHOP NOW, PLAY NOW, LEARN MORE (GKIS, 2021)

The Internet is a “buyer beware” environment. There are regulations about collecting information and marketing to children because they do not yet have the sophistication to make sound, informed financial decisions. However, marketers online can’t be sure who is watching their content. That means they can create marketing funnels that kids can fall into (GKIS, 2021). If adults can fall for marketing schemes, how easy could it be for kiddos? Even if advertisers insist that they are not marketing towards kids, they are, and they are very aware of it. However, they do not *\*technically\** know who is watching their advertisements, so they plead



The internet is an... unsavory place. As the internet has grown and expanded and as individuals have become more masterful with their use of the internet, it has gotten more difficult to navigate what is nonsense and what is legitimate. Some companies, even trusted companies such as Turbo Tax, have utilized dark patterns to increase their revenue. Dark patterns are persuasive techniques used by companies online to trick people into buying and signing up for things. These tricks are accomplished by exploiting human psychological processes so the company can maximize profits. The term dark pattern was coined by Harry Brignull, a cognitive scientist. He describes dark patterns as, “A user interface that has been carefully crafted to trick users into doing things... they are not mistakes, they are carefully crafted with a solid understanding of human psychology, and they do not have the user’s interest in mind.” (GKIS, 2021).

Dark Pattern	Description
Bait and Switch	The bait and switch technique refers to the act of advertising a ‘too good to be true’ price that is not stocked. By grabbing the customer’s attention, the chances of purchasing an alternatively higher-priced item go up.
Disguised Ad	Disguised ads are advertisements designed to appear like the content the user was searching for, so they’ll mistakenly click on them. They are typically presented to people during informational searches.
Forced Continuity	The forced continuity dark pattern is used when a company offers a free trial period. The company holds the customer responsible for unsubscribing from the free trial period, otherwise charging them for their subscription.
Obstruction	Obstruction refers to the strategy of making a particular task more difficult than it needs to be, with the intent to frustrate or confuse the customer so much they give up before completing the task. A common obstruction is hiding the unsubscribe link or instructions, so the customer gives up and keeps on paying their monthly subscription cost.

<b><i>Friend Spam</i></b>	Friend Spam refers to the devious act of asking for access to your social media friends list and then spamming them with ads. The user agrees because they're rushing through the signup process or under the impression that the friends list will be used for a desirable outcome, like finding more friends. LinkedIn was sued \$13 million in 2015 for using this dark pattern.
<b><i>Hidden Costs</i></b>	Hidden costs typically appear in the last step of the checkout process when the company asks for additional and unexpected charges, like delivery or shipping charges. Because the customer has already invested enthusiasm and time in the purchase, they are less likely to bail on the transition at the end of the process.
<b><i>Price Comparison Prevention</i></b>	This dark pattern is in play when the retailer makes it hard for the user to compare the prices of an item with another item to prevent them from making an informed buying decision.
<b><i>Privacy Zuckering</i></b>	Privacy Zuckering occurs when the customer is tricked into publicly sharing more information about themselves than they intended. This dark pattern was named after Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg because, in the company's early years of development, Facebook made it difficult for users to control their privacy settings and easy to overshare by mistake. Today, 'privacy zuckering' works more deviously, using data brokers to collect personal information that they sell to other companies. These techniques were described in Facebook's lengthy 'terms and conditions.' But most users won't read them because of the overly burdensome legalese.
<b><i>Roach Motel</i></b>	This dark pattern technique makes it easy for you to get into a certain situation but hard for you to get out of it. An example is if a customer wants to delete their profile or content on social media but are punished with unwanted consequences if they do so (like requiring you to lose all of your photos or contacts as a penalty for deletion).
<b><i>Sneak into the Basket</i></b>	Sneak into the Basket happens when the customer attempts to purchase something, but somewhere in the purchasing journey an additional item appears in their basket.
<b><i>Trick Question</i></b>	A trick question compels you to answer thinking one thing but, if read carefully, it asks for another thing entirely.
<b><i>Fear of Missing Out</i></b>	This dark pattern technique is made to look like the item you're thinking of purchasing is in high demand, pressuring you to make the decision quickly. Examples include a reminder of the number of people looking also at the specific item. The marketing technique of scarcity will alert you, "Only 3 left!" Booking hotel rooms, airplane flights, and merchandise on Amazon use this persuasive tactic to trigger your urgency and thus increase sales.
<b><i>Nagging/Forced Action</i></b>	A popup appears that requires action before you can move forward in your online task.
<b><i>Sneaking</i></b>	Sneaking refers to hiding, disguising, or delaying relevant information to force uninformed decisions.

<b>Intentional Misdirection</b>	Intentional misdirection is a persuasive technique that offers a promise for a free or inexpensive item, only to eventually inform you that the free item doesn't apply to you after all, and you must purchase a different solution. An example of this type of dark pattern is that was used by the company Turbo Tax. In this instance, Turbo Tax offered people the option to file their taxes online for free. But once in the sales funnel, customers discovered that the free option only applied to people needing to file a simple W-2 form (which is a small minority of taxpayers). Once customers purchased the paid option that applied to them, they would discover the extra \$60 to \$200 charges for any forms that deal with loans and mortgages. That moves what looks like a free service to an unexpected paid service.
---------------------------------	--

YouTube Celebrities and Beauty Gurus

Teens and young adults spend an average of 11.3 hours on YouTube each week, and 60% of them follow YouTube celebrities on social media. According to a survey conducted by Defy Media, nearly a third of teens ages 13 to 17 prefer YouTube celebrities over movie or TV celebrities. As of 2015, there were approximately 45.3 billion views on YouTube for beauty videos alone. Each month, 50 million people watch over 1.6 billion minutes of beauty guru content (GKIS, 2021).

Youtubers are able to be so deceptive because they intentionally create a false sense of intimacy in their videos that appeal to a lonely generation of young people. Intimate video titles such as “Get ready with me” or “Storytime” offer the viewer a false sense of friendship with the Youtuber. Many teens look to beauty gurus as role models. Unfortunately, beauty gurus rarely encourage their audience to explore interests outside of beauty and fashion. Instructional beauty videos reinforce gender stereotypes that our worth is based on beauty, which requires time, skill, and money to achieve and maintain (GKIS, 2021).

In the digital era of influencers and social media, it is easy to feel like you’re always being scrutinized and judged by others on the internet. Child psychologist David Elkind coined this developmental phenomenon with an imaginary audience. In the digital era, we are left wondering if the audience is indeed imaginary. After all, the hundreds of social media selfies and YouTube videos teens view each day provide fuel for consuming teen narcissism and egocentrism (GKIS, 2021).

What you can do:

- Emphasize to your kids (and yourself) that worth is more than skin deep. Provide opportunities for intellectual, spiritual, and character growth.
- Be a good role model. Makeup-free days and clean, natural living balances special, glitzy occasions.
- Filter streaming video content to kids and tweens with supervision and YouTube Kids. The more developed your child’s personality and self-concept, the more resilient she’ll be in the face of relentless marketing.
- Educate your child about the risks and benefits of watching beauty guru videos. Make sure she understands that beauty videos are meticulously edited to make a profit from unsuspecting targets.
- Help your child to know that they don’t need to alter their appearance to be genuinely loved and accepted.
- Monitor and limit how often your teen watches beauty guru content. Take notice if your child is showing compulsive viewing habits or is negatively affected by the content they are consuming.
- Teach balanced, healthy, and fun beauty activities like giving to others, gratefulness, kindness, a clean diet, and satisfying fitness. Beauty radiates from within, not from ten-minute ombré lips and \$50 shimmer (GKIS, 2021).

---

### *Youtubers are not our friends –*

*Recognizing that YouTubers are strangers with no particular skill set or expert training is the first step to a healthy approach for viewing content. No matter how much they try to sell the idea they're your "close friends," they don't know you nor do they care about your particular vulnerabilities.*

---

YouTube celebrities and influencers make their money off of advertising. Even if they don't truly endorse a product, they will pray on the vulnerability of their viewers to make money. Ads that play before the video starts or products that they advertise in their videos. They will usually say that a company "sponsored" a specific episode and if you use a code (usually their name) when you make a purchase from that company's website you will get a discount. When celebrities endorse a product, they lend their credibility to it. Viewers think, "I trust them. If they like it, I like it." To maintain credibility with their fans, celebrities must be honest about their support of a product. However, YouTube influencers who are out for quick cash with little regard for their credibility and reputation scam their fans with inflated prices and hidden shipping costs (GKIS, 2021).

Youtubers will even use classic marketing techniques to dupe teenage viewers into spending outrageous amounts of money. They will make it seem like there is an amazing deal (i.e. 9X THE VALUE) and that there is a time limit on the sale (i.e. ONLY 3 DAYS REMAINING – GET IT NOW). This is a marketing technique referred to as "scarcity." An example of scarcity would be an ad saying something such as, buy now before you miss out on a one-time limited offer." The urgency drives consumers to impulsively buy. YouTubers commonly say three things that reflect scarcity. They will say:

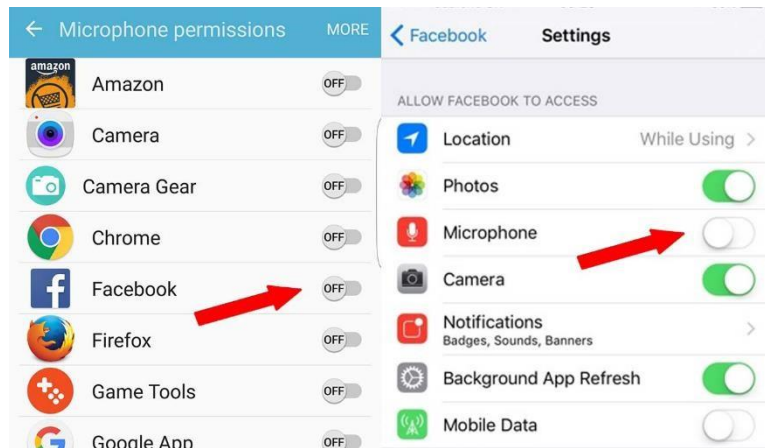
- the product is amazing and insist you're getting a great deal.
- the product is in short supply, or the deal is a limited-time offer.
- "I don't want you to miss out on this".

Beauty guru Jeffree Star used scarcity to sell his collection of eyeshadow palettes priced around \$80 each in only three minutes. No wonder he's worth \$50 million! (GKIS, 2021)

### Online Privacy

We have all been the victim of "ad retargeting" on Google or Facebook, "ad targeting" refers to a marketer using data about your browsing or buying history to specifically target you for particular product sales. It always creeps me out when I search something on Google and then an ad pops up for that same item on Facebook. But have you ever talked about something with a friend or coworker then started getting ads for that item without having typed it in to an actual search engine, website, or program? While Facebook recording conversations is a rumor, multiple Facebook users have reported having a conversation about something in person then having an ad for it on Facebook the next day. Although most of us willingly sign over our private information in exchange for fun content, here are some ways to minimize risk (GKIS, 2021).

- Turn off the feature that tracks your location and embeds that data on your photos. For iPhone go to Settings > Privacy > Microphone and then unselect Facebook. On Android, go to Settings > Personal > Privacy > Safety > App permissions > Microphone and unselect Facebook.



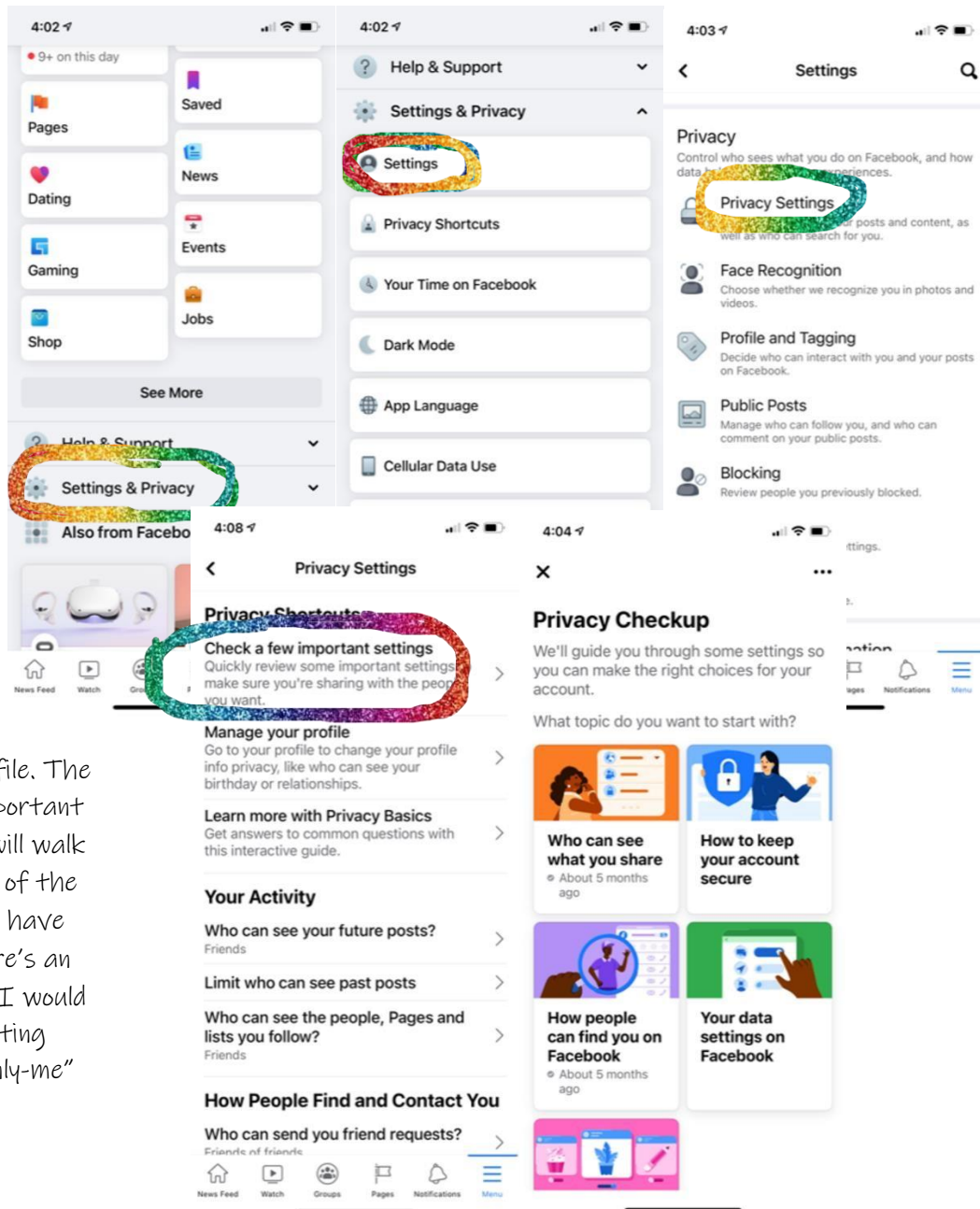
- Turn off location services.
- Avoid giving away private information.
- Do not open or click on anything that looks suspicious.
- Use a password generator, which is a software program or web page that will generate a one-time password for you to strengthen your cybersecurity (GKIS, 2021)

### Be Careful What You Send

Things that you post online are out there in the virtual world forever, even if you delete the post from your social media. Even with apps like Snapchat who state that stories are “deleted” after 24 hours, or that your snap can only be viewed for 10 seconds, once the picture or text is sent, it is permanent to some degree. If someone ever posts your pictures without your permission on Facebook or other social media platforms, there are things that you can do to get the photos taken down. Here are some tips to stay safe on social media –

- Don’t ever post **photos with intimate content**. You never really know where they’ll end up!
- Think twice before you post your **children’s photos** on social media.
- Select **strict privacy settings** on all social media profiles from the beginning rather than waiting until the damage is done.
  - There are even worse situations that could occur, such as virtual kidnapping, where a person collects personal information from your social media accounts and uses it to extort money from your loved ones, saying you are in danger and will be harmed or even killed if they do not send money. Or imagine if a child pornographer collects and shares your images with other sickos! Dr. Bennett suggests we re-label “child pornography” to be “images of child sexual assault.” I hadn’t considered that before, but I agree with her because that’s exactly what it is (GKIS, 2021).
- **Disable location services** for Facebook on your mobile device.





Facebook surprisingly makes it pretty easy to lock down your profile. The “Check a Few Important Settings” option will walk you through most of the process, and if you have any questions there’s an interactive guide. I would recommend setting everything to “only-me” and “friends”

“Privacy Settings” will help out a lot, but I would recommend looking at all of these other tabs as well. This includes Face Recognition, Profile and Tagging, Public Posts, Location, and Active Status.

## Protecting Your Reputation and Wellbeing Cyberbullying

People tend to feel a lot bolder and more aggressive behind a keyboard and will say truly shocking things that they would never say in real life, these people are called *keyboard warriors*. We all know one... or two... or twelve. They will “troll” (make a deliberately offensive or provocative online post with the aim of upsetting someone or eliciting an angry response from them) on public forums or private message someone and say offensive things. Cyberbullying is so dangerous because it is so easy for a lot of people to get involved, as an

example, a friend of mine got into a fight with one person, and at least four people messaged her online saying very unsavory things. They didn't see it as cyberbullying (even though it definitely was) because, in their minds, they were "defending" a friend. It's so much easier to be mean when we don't see our words register on our victim's face (GKIS, 2021).

It is important to remember that the person on the other side of the keyboard/screen is a person, with feelings and traumas and other things going on in their life that might be impacting them. Saying that one thing online, just to be a troll or because you think it is funny, could be what pushes another person over the edge. There are hundreds of reasons for taking it too far online. What you most need to remember is that, even though the online culture is commonly brutal and unkind, it doesn't mean it's OK for you to act that way. Your online choice may come back to bite you later in ways you can't possibly anticipate. Before you decide to confront somebody online for acting in a way you didn't like, imagine the look on their face if you were to say it in person. Or consider how you'd feel if they were telling their parents what you wrote in front of your parents. If you'd feel bad having it read aloud, then it's better not to type it at all (GKIS, 2021).

For any single cyberbullying incident, there are various levels of participation, many of which involve an assessment of other online bystanders. These include:

- The perpetrator who posts harmful content (with varying levels of malicious intent)
- Those who encouragingly "like" or comment on the post
- Those who encouragingly comment via backchannel chat
- Those who share or "favorite" the posts
- Those who repeatedly bring the content back via online sharing or in the form of gossip or face-toface bullying. (Repeat sharing sometimes goes on for years!)
- Those who view and "friend" or remain "friends" with the cyberbully online or offline
- Those who emulate the cyberbully's technique
- Those who view the cyberbullying incident without further action
- Those who view the cyberbullying incident and comment their protest via backchannel chat
- Those who view the cyberbullying incident and comment their protest
- Those who flag the content as inappropriate or request Web mediation
- Those who request adult intervention through parents, academic staff, or law enforcement



As public as cyberbullying usually is, many kids choose not to intervene when they witness it happening. This can be for a variety of reasons such as trivialization, dissociation, embarrassment association, audience modeling, busy working priority, compliance with the competitive norm, or responsibility transfer.

<i><b>Term</b></i>	<i><b>Definition</b></i>
<i><b>Trivialization</b></i>	The child doesn't consider the incident serious (often because cyberbullying is so common children are desensitized).
<i><b>Dissociation</b></i>	The child feels they are not involved in the situation or is not a friend of the cyberbully or the victim.
<i><b>Embarrassment Association</b></i>	The child doesn't want to make the victim more embarrassed or doesn't want to get embarrassed themselves (stage-fright).
<i><b>Audience Modeling</b></i>	The child looks to bystanders for the social norm.
<i><b>Busy Working Priority</b></i>	The child considers doing other things a higher priority than helping.
<i><b>Compliance with the Competitive Norm</b></i>	The child considers social media etiquette or politeness more important than helping behavior.
<i><b>Responsibility Transfer</b></i>	The child ascribes more responsibility to other bystanders than themselves (e.g., online peers who are more involved with the bully or victim or online viewers with more authority).

### Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

FOMO or “fear of missing out” is a form of social anxiety in response to seeing activities streamed on social media. These feelings can blossom into immediate disappointment or long-term feelings of inadequacy. You know you should be happy. You're ashamed of it. But still ... people who experience FOMO the most tend to be extremely active on social media sites like Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook (GKIS, 2021). You might have FOMO if –

- Compulsive social media checking that gets in the way of everyday activities and leads to texting and driving, like “snap and drive” which is careless driving while Snapchatting.
- Inability to prioritize important responsibilities over fun social media posting.
- Posting shocking activities like binge drinking and drug use.
- Spending lots of money to post expensive designer items.
- The constant need to feed is a sure-fire way to develop feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. FOMO makes us feel lonelier, inferior, and less successful.

### Reducing FOMO Anxiety

- **Get real.** ○ A fun post here and there is not reflective of the “perfect” life. Everybody hurts sometimes, even the pretty ones.
- **Cop to it.** ○ Once you admit to it, it's easier to control it and create a plan of action to work through it.
- **Be in the present.**
  - Practice mindfulness techniques like anchoring – attending to your current surroundings, what you see, feel, hear, smell, and your breathing.
- **Recommit to your nonvirtual life.**
  - Pet that dog you always see on your way to work. Stop and smell the flowers. Read a book in the park. Give yourself ample time to finally finish that term paper or work project. Commit to doing one of those today, right now!
- **Temporarily detox.**

- If momentary disconnection is a struggle, delete apps off your phone and use psychological wellness app support. Cool detox apps include Moment, Flipd, and Forest. Detox apps offer fun and clever incentives to get off your phone. For instance, Forest incites you to not open social media by illustrating breaks with forest growth and how large and lush and large you can grow your forest.
- **Seek counseling.** If all else fails, talk it out. Since FOMO is seen as a cognitive distortion, cognitive behavioral therapy has been shown to be highly effective by offering thought reconstructing tools. In other words, identifying stinking thinking and replacing it with can-do thinking can greatly improve mood and feelings of well-being. Fewer social media posts may mean a fulfilling life is being lived off camera rather than no life is happening at all (GKIS, 2021).



### Digital Footprint and Online Reputation

**Flexing** (showing off wealth) **on the Gram** (Instagram) has become a popular social media trend. With a continuous stream of real-time, unfiltered, unedited, and freshly published posts, fans have an on demand, front-row seat of the lavish lifestyles of the rich and famous. The **compare and despair** of watching friends, celebrities, and idols live lavish lifestyles makes them believe they too need cars, houses, and clothes to succeed in life.

People are very connected to social media, and when you are seeing this content everyday telling you that you need a certain thing to be happy/successful, it is difficult to ignore. Especially for impressionable young people. Sure, designer things can be cool, but they are WAY overly expensive and WAY over hyped. The only reason that designer items are considered “cool” is because this one specific person(s) said that the designer thing is cool and said you’re not cool if you don’t have it. Social psychologists call this new phenomenon **Instagram Envy**. Child psychologist, Allen Kanner, states that children believe, “If I could have this product that’s associated with all of this success, then I’m going to be able to join this world. I’ll feel better about myself.” (GKIS, 2021) It is important to remember that the things that you own don’t determine your worth as a person. You can buy your makeup from a drug store or your clothes from Walmart and still be equally as happy and successful as someone who buys expensive makeup and brand name apparel.

### Why do people show off on social media?

“Some show off on social media to make a statement to the world. People want to prove they’ve made it to the top. They want to exhibit their strengths and accomplishments. Others show off “to arouse jealousy, envy, or other negative emotions” in others. They create Instagram Envy to prove that they can’t be

overshadowed. Some people believe that showing off their money will bring them more friends. Teens are particularly vulnerable to the need for attention and validation.” (GKIS, 2021).

A *selfie* is a self-portrait typically taken with a smartphone with the intent of sharing through text message or social media post for attention-seeking, communication, documenting one’s day, and entertainment (GKIS, 2021). Browsing through Instagram, or any social media, it looks like social media celebrities have perfect lives. Their hair always looks perfect, their makeup looks perfect, and it seems like they’re always with friends or doing something fun. It’s good to remember that they’re probably only taking a picture because of all of those things look perfect, but that’s not always what they’re doing. No one wants to take a picture of themselves looking like a mess, sitting at home, and eating Cheetos, then post it on social media. People typically want to present themselves in the best way possible, so they only post pictures and selfies when they are looking their best (including celebrities). It is also important to remember that most of the selfies you see online are edited, and some are edited dramatically. Makeup and selfie editor apps are very commonly used and include features to –

- Change eye color
- “Slim and trim to selfie perfection”
- Enlarge features
- Shrink the nose
- Plump the lips
- Enhance facial contours
- And even offer hundreds of pupil templates “to make your eyes look beautiful.” (GKIS, 2021).

No one always looks like an Instagram photo because that would be crazy (unless you have *a lot* of time and money). Teenagers expecting to look like social media celebrities is also crazy, because their look can only be achieved with digital editing. Having this unrealistic expectation of physical appearance can lead to issues with body dysmorphia and overall self-esteem.

### How can we inoculate our kids against unhealthy self-perception and distorted body image?

- Love and compliment your kids loudly and unapologetically for all they are! This includes their worthiness of love just for being the “perfect,” nondigitally enhanced them.
- Reinforce that the self is made up of far more facets than a beautiful face. Likes, interests, skills, and traits make up what’s important about a person, not eye size and hair color.
- Discuss the fact that we will be hanging out with our bodies for the long haul, which means we must treat our bodies as our best friends rather than our enemies.
- Lead by example. Do you voice your disapproval about your face or body aloud to your kids? If you do, they too will follow suit about themselves. Instead, be loud and proud of the woman or man you are today. Value yourself just as you would like your daughter or son to value themselves.
- Implement healthy eating, sleeping, and exercise habits and explain why that is so important for strength and health. I prefer to focus on words like “delicious” “nourishing” for healthy food to highlight lifestyle factors and frame nutritious food options as a treat, rather than words like “diet” or “cleanse” or “cheat” that focus on junk food as treats and healthy foods as punishment while aggrandizing shaming fads.
- Remind your teen that what they see on social media and in ads isn’t always the real deal. Take an Internet browsing journey with them researching this topic by searching “photoshop hacks” or looking

up Jean Kilbourne's ground-breaking work in this area with her "Killing Us Softly" video series. A must see! (GKIS, 2021)

## Online Persona

### Do employers and colleges care what you post online?

It turns out they do! Not only do employers recruit via social media, but they also screen out potential hires based on their virtual portrayal of themselves. A 2016 survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management revealed:

- Recruiting via social media is growing, with 84% of corporations using it currently and 9% planning to use it.
- 44% of HR professionals agreed that a job candidate's public social media profile can provide information about work-related performance.
- 36% of organizations have disqualified a job candidate in the past year because of concerning information (e.g., an illegal activity or a discrepancy with application) found on a public social media profile or through an online search. (GKIS, 2021)

I have seen first-hand that employers look up employees on social media. My old boss at a corporate store would look up applicants on Facebook to see how they presented themselves online. If their profile picture or cover photo looked a little... questionable... they would no longer be considered as candidates. You don't have to be 100% perfect but be mindful of what employers might think looking at your content online (i.e. don't have your profile picture as a picture of you flipping off the camera or wearing a t-shirt that has vulgar language). This does not stop at profile pictures, also be mindful of memes and statuses that you post, as well as pictures that you are tagged in.

### How to fix up online persona

- Step one: Cleanse your social media profiles and cyber footprint of disadvantageous content.
    - Google yourself and track down and delete unwanted content
    - Cleanse all social media profiles, even those set on private
  - Step two: Create an irresistible virtual you!
    - Choose two or three popular social media platforms
    - Virtualize your perfect virtual self and plan before you tackle to project
    - Be strategic, concise, and innovative.
    - Friend and join influential others
- (GKIS, 2021)

### 6 ways to make your online profile a college/employer magnet

- Switch from teen personal to adult professional with a first-person tone that is warm and welcoming. Make certain any content that a future employer may see as inappropriate, or silly has been deleted.
- Write a mission statement detailing what opportunities you are looking for. Avoid buzzwords and lingo. Stick to what's relevant.
- Keep your connections education- and employment-focused. Don't get frivolous and network with everybody. Be selective and seek out those who may lead to mutual opportunity.
- Include an attractive headshot.
- Include contact information, an email link, and custom URLs for your website or other social media profiles.

- Highlight impressive activities/achievements related to education, employment, & community service. Testimonials and endorsements are powerful. Make sure your online profiles are consistent with the content on your résumé.

## Online Predators and Hate Groups

*In real-life neighborhoods, your nosey neighbors help keep an eye out for strangers acting weird. There is little security in online neighborhoods. If somebody gets reported and kicked off the platform for acting inappropriately, they can simply return with a new username and fake image. We often can't even tell an adult from a kid – and certainly not the good guys from the bad guys. To stay safe, you are going to have to make wise decisions about what online neighborhoods you visit (like which social media platforms you use, which video games you play, and which online forums and websites you visit). You'll also have to play it smart when it comes to designing your avatar, character, or profile and disclosing personal information about yourself.*

*Predators actively seek victims. They test out their techniques over and over until they are master manipulators. No matter how savvy you think you are at reading people, ANYBODY can be deceived online without their knowing it. And it's not just single bad actors that are intent on manipulating you, hate groups, conspiracy theorists, and influencers are also experts at dishonestly snaring members. If you ever feel like something is weird or you feel uneasy about somebody's behavior, always trust your gut. That means pay attention to your inner voice. Don't discount it. Run the situation by somebody older than you that you trust to uncover what your instincts are trying to signal to you.*

*The Southern Poverty Law Center estimates that 940 hate groups are operating in the United States. Fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, immigration fears, an increasingly global economy, troubled race relations, and divisive politics, the number of hate groups in 2021 was more than a 55% increase since 2000. When one considers that the Internet is worldwide, the potential for online hate is staggering. Hate groups and cults have a powerful recruitment tool with the internet. Too many of our mass shooters have been radicalized online. Our kids may not only viewing manipulative recruiting information, but they may also be assessed for vulnerabilities. (GKIS, 2021).*



## Here are GetKidsInternetSafe Tips to Avoid Being a Victim of Virtual Kidnapping

- Set your social media profiles to private and avoid giving out personal information.
- Occasionally cleanse your social media profile of photos.
- Download GPS location-sharing apps to family member phones, such as Find My iPhone, Find Friends, or Life360.
- Create an emergency plan, which includes a list sharing of names and phone numbers of workplace landlines, friends, and extended family.
- If you get a suspicious call, assess its authenticity.
- If they are on the victim's phone, recognize that the phone may have been hacked and forwarded to another phone or lost or stolen.

- Recognize that scammers often ask for money to be wired through services like Western Union or online currency like bitcoin, as these methods of payment are untraceable.
- Stay calm, slow the caller down, and do not share any personal information. Ask them to answer a question only the victim would know. Don't challenge or argue with the caller.
- Use another device to call the police while on the phone.
- Ask questions and, if feasible, demand a call from the victim's phone or a picture of the victim.
- Get to a safe place as soon as possible.

### The Red Flag Strategies of Hate Groups and Cults

- **Sensational Messaging Based on Deception and False Facts to Trigger Intrigue, Suspicion, and Paranoia** (e.g., "Did you know that Martin Luther King Jr. was not a legitimate reverend?")
- **Attempts to Isolate the Subject by Exploiting Emotional Vulnerabilities and Destabilizing Friend and Family Support**
  - Isolation starts with probes that assess susceptibility (e.g., "Where is your computer?" "Are you alone?") and attempts to validate emotion and join ("I know what that feels like." "You can trust me."). Once the victim shows interest and openness, the recruiter challenges their belief system and attacks the credibility of family and friends. If the recruiter can tap into fear and insecurity, they can then start to target blame (e.g., "Do your parents overlook and dismiss you?" "Do you feel lonely and misunderstood?" "If they loved you, they would not control you as they do.").
- **The Promise of a Cure for Emotional Pain** (promising sanctuary, secret intimacy, romantic unconditional love, belonging to a community, wealth, fame, power over others, escape, a spiritual "answer," and protection)
- **Intense unrelenting pressure to build trust and a sense of belonging**
  - Online blogs are highly effective in nurturing belief change with long narratives dispersed over time. Cyber communities' bond with a sense of special belonging, shared values and practices, and a fierce sense of elitism and pride. The goal is to tempt subjects into slowly sacrificing free will and becoming increasingly reliant on the group to do their thinking for them. Members are often encouraged to troll others in support of their radicalized beliefs.
- **Marketing Techniques and Products Targeting Teens**
  - Inducing guilt by providing offers of friendship and gifts leaves subjects feeling that they owe the recruiter and must give back. Hyped meetings, branding, and merchandising support the power and exclusivity of the group (e.g., slogans, symbols, colors, mascots, music, video games, and customized slang).
- **Tests of Loyalty and Intimidation to Create Blind Obedience** (e.g., "We have direct authority from a divine power.")
- **Invitations and Offers for Wealth and Travel** (GKIS, 2021)

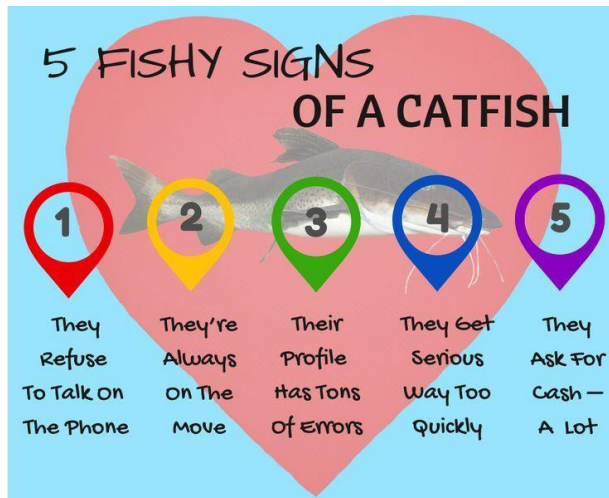


### Catfish

Not everything you read online is real, nor is everybody you meet. You have been "catfished" when you meet an individual online who created a fake profile for the purpose of deception. Catfishing varies in severity, from posting younger pictures of oneself to stealing another's identity. Most commonly experienced



in dating websites or social media accounts, catfishing has provoked an increasing amount of skepticism and fear when it comes to meeting people online. (GKIS, 2021)



Red flags that you are being catfished:

The person:

- is too good to be true
- demands too much contact or acts possessive
- is overly elaborative
- attempts to pull you in with dramatic stories of victimhood or emotional distress
- makes too many promises
- refuses to facetime or meet in person (GKIS, 2021)

## Protecting Your Emotional Wellness

### Distraction from Real-Life Relationships and Activities

It is important to have in-person face-to-face time with friends and family. “Hanging out online rather than offline is pretty great. But it is important to keep in mind that, like with most things in life, balance is important. Offline friendships tend to be closer and of higher quality than online friendships. It is your offline friends that are more likely to show up for you when you need them. And time spent face-to-face tends to be more fun and more fulfilling than online chats.” (GKIS, 2021)

The research confirms that allowing yourself to get too distracted by your smart devices can be a problem. In fact, the mere presence of a smartphone in the room, even when it's turned off, has been demonstrated to interfere with interpersonal closeness, trust, and understanding. Researchers also argue that social skills, like empathy and patience, deteriorate as a result of screen use (GKIS, 2021). It's hard to not get distracted and check text messages and social media when you get a notification, and if your phone is off, you just sit there and wonder if you are missing any important notifications. I am not in a position to turn off notifications for texts and emails but turning off notifications for social media (Facebook and Instagram) has helped me to disconnect from my phone a bit more.

In addition to letting social media distract you from real life relationships, it can also give you unrealistic expectations for your body. If you're on social media for 4+ hours a day looking at photoshopped people with professionally done makeup and hair, you'll start to feel like you should like that way. Seeing real life people with real bodies and real faces is a healthy reminder that just about no one looks perfect on a daily basis. It is also important to remember that inner beauty is just as important as outer beauty, and that people are much more than just their outward appearance.

To help you maintain a healthy self-image while viewing online altered images, keep these quick thoughts in mind:

- **People are far more than their body parts.** ○ Behind every text, image, and idea is a human being with thoughts, feelings, and value. Treating yourself or others as a sexy object instead of a complex, capable person is demeaning.
- **Screen media is a powerful tool.**



- Once you hit “send,” that text, image, or video can never be taken back. Consider if it would be OK to show it on the screen in a school assembly before you send it to anybody.
- **Save private interactions for face-to-face relationships.** ○ Any posts, texts, or instant messages are unlikely to stay private. Assume moms, dads, school principals, peers, frenemies, and even strangers may see them. All it takes is a screenshot and a share. Also, tone and meaning are easily misunderstood on text. Any discussion that may lead to hurt feelings is best left for face-to-face contact.
- **Collecting “likes” is not love.**
  - Sometimes it’s even the opposite. **When you really need somebody, it’s your offline friends and family that will be there for you, not your online friends.** Online relationships are fun. But keep in mind that online interactions are a cheap and less satisfying than offline friends and family. Tend to both.
- **Represent yourself online just as you would offline.** ○ Character matters. Build a digital footprint that highlights your best self. Well-crafted digital footprints that highlight your academics, charity projects, special interests, social endeavors, travel, and creativity may help you get the college or job offer of your dreams. Unkind comments and off-putting humor may lose opportunities for you. Save off-color jokes, disagreements, complaints, and worst moments for offline discussions with those you’re really trust, like best friends and family (GKIS, 2021)

## Protecting Your Physical Wellness – Overuse, Repetitive Strain, Postural, and Distraction Injuries

### Distracted Driving

- Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death for children, and texting while driving is the cause of 25% of all driving accidents.
- Texting while driving has become a 6x bigger hazard than drinking while driving.
- Ninety- five percent of drivers disapprove of distracted driving, yet 71% admit to doing it.
- In the five-seconds it takes to respond to a text while driving 55 mph, one travels the entire length of a football field.
- A 2012 AAA Foundation in-car study found that teens are distracted during up to a quarter of their time behind the wheel (GKIS, 2021)

### GKIS Tips For Distraction-Free Driving

- Enable “do not disturb while driving” options on your smartphone.
- Stash your phone away when driving. Even when disabled, it’s still too tempting to grab it for nav or music.

- If you're the kind of person that can't stand radio commercials, create a music playlist on your phone so you don't have to go searching through your phone for a song while you drive.
- If you need to take an important phone call, pull over to the side of the road.
- Use Bluetooth. While it is still mentally distracting to be talking on the phone and you aren't able to pull over, Bluetooth keeps your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.
- Plan ahead and look up directions before starting the car.
- While there are days when running late is unavoidable, do your best to be ready before you get in the car. That means makeup, hair, and breakfast are already taken care of rather than dining while dashing.
- Last but not least, regularly remind your teens that using their smartphone while driving is not worth losing their life. Remind them that driving is a huge responsibility, and their car is a 2-ton weapon. (GKIS, 2021)

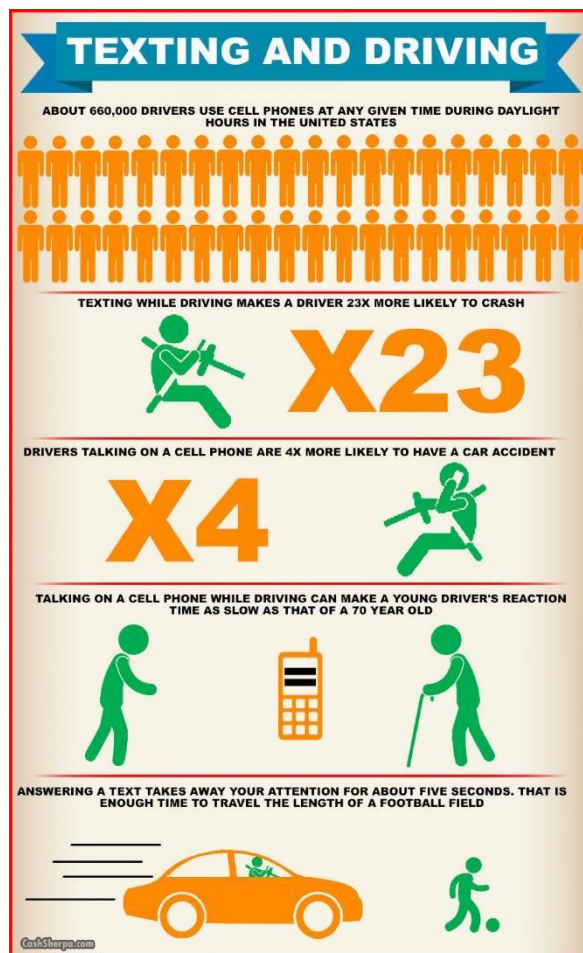
### Repetitive Strain Injuries

Overuse or *repetitive strain injuries* (RTI), refers to bodily injuries that result from reduced blood flow to the muscles, bones, and ligaments as a result of poor posture or repeated movement. Repetitive strain injuries from excessive screen use include tendonitis in the shoulder, elbow, forearm, wrist, or hand, back or neck strain, or carpal tunnel syndrome. Here are a few other preventable overuse injuries you may not be aware of that are common among kids and teens.

- **Ocular Migraines** ○ Symptoms of *ocular migraines* include visual disturbances like temporary vision loss, blind spots, auras, flashing lights or seeing stars, and zigzag lines.
- **Tinnitus** ○ *Tinnitus* refers to a hissing, buzzing, whistling, roaring, or ringing in the ears that result from exposure to excessive and loud noises.
- **Postural Injuries** ○ A postural injury refers to injuries that result from accumulated pressure due to poor posture while sitting, using your computer, driving, wearing high heels, or standing.
  - The most common postural injuries include
    - lower back pain
    - neck pain
    - shoulder impingement
    - knee pain
    - carpal tunnel syndrome
    - piriformis syndrome (GKIS, 2021)

### Here are some great injury prevention ideas

- Balance off-screen and on-screen activities



- Encourage your kids to refocus their eyes for twenty seconds after every twenty minutes of screen time
- Implement ergonomics, the study of people, and their efficiency when interacting in different environments. The primary goal of ergonomics is to arrange a workplace so that it fits the individual working there. Ergonomic computer setups include:
  - Eyes leveled with the top of the screen
  - Head and neck balanced and in-line with the torso
  - Shoulders relaxed
  - Elbows supported and close to the body
  - Wrists and hands in-line with forearms
  - Feet flat on the floor
  - Overhead lighting dim to prevent glare

## Screen Addiction

Here are some signs that may alert you if you need to detox from gaming, video browsing, shopping, or social media. Check off any that apply:

- ☐ *Preoccupation*: Do you spend a lot of time thinking about games even when you are not playing, or planning when you can play next?
- ☐ *Withdrawal*: Do you feel restless, moody, irritable, angry, anxious, or sad when attempting to cut down or stop gaming, or when you're unable to play?
- ☐ *Tolerance*: Do you feel the need to play for increasing amounts of time, play more exciting games, or use more powerful equipment to get the same amount of excitement you used to get?
- ☐ *Reduce/stop*: Do you feel that you should play less, but are unable to cut back on the amount of time you spend playing games?
- ☐ *Give up other activities*: Do you lose interest in or reduce participation in other fun activities (hobbies, meeting with friends) due to gaming?
- ☐ *Continue despite problems*: Do you continue games even though you are aware of negative consequences, such as not getting enough sleep, being late to school, spending too much money, having arguments with others, or neglecting important duties.
- ☐ *Deceive/cover up*: Do you lie to family, friends, or others about how much you game, or try to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you game?
- ☐ *Escape adverse moods*: Do you game to escape from or forget about personal problems, or to relieve uncomfortable feelings such as guilt, anxiety, helplessness, or depression?
- ☐ *Risk/lose relationships/opportunities*: Do you risk or lose significant relationships, or job, educational, or career opportunities because of gaming?

If you checked 2 or 3 items, you may have a mild problem. If you checked 4 or 5 items, you may have a moderate problem. If you checked 6 or more items, you may have a severe problem.

In service of rescuing more meaningful moments, here are the GKIS 6 effective ways to cleanse your digital palette.

6 Effective Ways to Cleanse Your Digital Palette	Benefit
--	---------

<i>Trim the Digital Fat</i>	Those of us who love your screen time must implement a balanced life diet by consistently purging the digital desserts that bloat us with empty calories. Those social media friends who annoy you? The pesky subscription emails you never read? The apps with unnecessary little red terrorist notifications? DELETE THEM. Only preserve the digital notifications that have a worthwhile purpose. Your precious brain fuel depends on it.
<i>Set Healthy Screen Boundaries</i>	Carve out blackout times and situations where screen media is not allowed, for kids and parents. Brains need rest. Agree to no screens in bedrooms, behind closed doors, or at mealtime. Triggering a data chase when your time is better spent resting or engaging with those you love can add up to tragic lost opportunity. And for kids, unsupervised screen use increases risk dramatically.
<i>Recognize that Multitasking is a Myth</i>	We must face it. Our brains are built for only one task at a time. Toggling between tasks that require the same brain resources takes longer and burns oxygenated glucose, the very brain energy you need to be productive. Block schedule and do one task at a time rather than trying to juggle several and doing them all poorly. And don't trust yourself if you think you multitask awesomely. People can't accurately assess response costs.
<i>Get Your Eyes Off Your Screen and Onto Your People</i>	It may be fun to gobble up free screen media activity, but you will hate yourself for missing out on precious moments with friends and family. And those servers and colleagues that help you out every day? They're people too. A witty interaction here and there fuels your happy center. Make sure you snack on random acts of friendliness often in the non-digital world. Your emotional fitness requires it.
<i>Stop with the Picture Taking and Make Mad Passionate Love with Mindfulness</i>	The psychological research is exploding with impressive results about the restorative qualities of mindfulness, imagery, and meditation. It's irrefutable evidence that being fully engaged and emotionally present is as essential as broccoli and filtered water. Make it happen and often. That means less social media, less guilt.
<i>Bone Up on Rejuvenating Self-Soothing</i>	In order to keep your inner productive beast in-line, you must hire a mentalemotional security detail. Your most effective soldiers are diaphragmatic breathing, cognitive restructuring (changing your stinking thinking into happy celebratory thinking), and yoga. Not only do these techniques calm your heart and mind, but they are also great for the body. Family, friends, and community also nourish your spirit.

## Emotional Readiness

### A Growth Mindset & Beginners Mind

To be open to learn, one must adopt a growth mindset. A growth mindset means the ability to believe that good things will happen based on your willingness to work hard, practice smart strategies, and welcome input from others. That means being ready to grow and move forward without fear. A beginner's mind allows one to be open and capable of change. Those with a growth mindset and beginner's mind don't think they are destined to achieve one set outcome based on something like intelligence or the neighborhood they live in. Instead, they are willing to enjoy the journey and believe that anything is possible. Having a beginner's mind puts us in a state of readiness with friendly curiosity and acceptance that there is no right or wrong. It helps us combat things that can get us stuck like fear and forming rigid opinions. By repeating a positive mantra, like "I

can experience. I can learn. I can change. I can grow;” you may be able to face challenges head-on and work your way through to places you can only dream about until you’re there (GKIS, 2021)

## Identifying Emotional Triggers

To get into the open state of the beginner’s mind, one must have awareness of how their environment affects them. Everyday things happen that impact our feelings and behavior, and it is important to know how different external happenings might impact you. Sometimes we are aware of these **triggers** (the event that causes that feeling). Other times they happen without our realizing it. We call those responses we are aware of a **conscious response** and those we are unaware of an **unconscious or automatic response**. (GKIS, 2021)



### Types of Triggers

#### Triggers you see:

People, places, objects

#### Triggers you hear:

A particular sound (scream, song, growl, footsteps, tone of voice)

Content of a news report, what somebody says,

#### Triggers you smell:

Chemicals, food, perfume,

#### Triggers you feel:

Clothing textures, touch, pain

#### Emotional triggers:

Fear, hunger, tired, disappointment

#### Situational triggers:

Competition

Emotional violence (cyberbullying)

Rushed situations

Enticing situations

Unfamiliar situations

Conflict

Risk

Performance situations

Witness to violence

Copyright © 2020 Dr. Tracy Bennett



### Setting intention

What’s going right in your life?

What are you most grateful for?

Where do you feel out of balance?

What is something you have always aspired to but never created the opportunity?

What do you most admire in others?

What are you very curious about?

When are you your very happiest?

What fears would you like to release?

What traits in yourself would you most like to soften?

What traits in yourself would you most like to polish?

When you think of forgiveness, who comes to mind?

Which relationships would you like to honour and improve?

What makes you feel most rejuvenated, creative, and renewed?

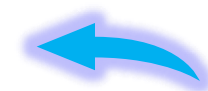
When do you feel most like your self?

What is your vision of success?

Copyright © 2020 Dr. Tracy Bennett



We can achieve better emotional control if we become aware of our triggers. Here is a list of different types of triggers that might be able to help you identify yours!



## Setting Intention

**Setting intention** means activating an openness and receptivity to a guiding principle of your choice. It’s the next step after achieving your

Remember, intention is set with the heart as well as with the mind. The touchy-feeliness aspect is what makes it different from a goal. Being open to intention means being without judgement or evaluation...it’s simple *being*. That’s different than a goal, which is a stated intention of getting to a particular place. With a goal you either meet it or you don’t. With an intention you are always in a state of quiet awareness and effort. A goal is like a destination; whereas an intention is like a journey (GKIS,

## Mindfulness

**Mindfulness techniques** teach us to focus on our breathing while calmly accepting our body sensations, thoughts, emotions, and behavior in the present moment. By focusing on the present in a nonjudgmental and accepting way, we can emotionally “reset” from worried states about past mistakes or upcoming stressors.



### Mindfulness techniques have also been found to help with

- chronic pain
- stress-related conditions like depression and anxiety
- addiction
- childbirth, and
- parenting among other things.

If you are a living person, you have probably experienced some sort of negative emotion about something at some point. Maybe someone cut you in line at the grocery store, or one of your friends hasn't texted you back for a while, or someone gave you a "weird" look. Any number of things can cause you to react negatively, but much of the time, this stress is completely unnecessary. Using the example of a friend not texting you back for a few days, it is sometimes easy to let your mind do something like this – *Oh my gosh, I must have done something wrong. Let's think back on the last five years of friendship and see if I did something horrible back then. Maybe it's just my entire*

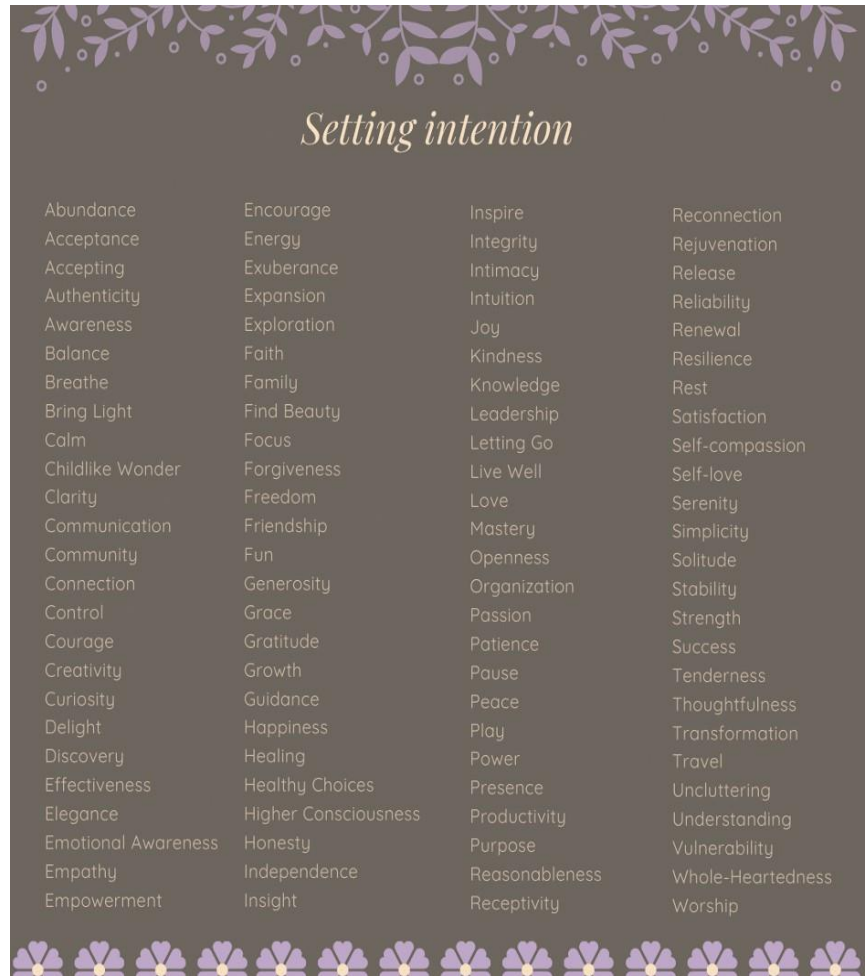
*personality... am I just a bad friend? Or a bad person? They would be wrong if they didn't hate me, honestly.*

It's easy to let your thoughts run away with your head and assume the worst, but chances are, nothing is wrong, and your buddy just got busy or forgot to text back. To avoid all of that unnecessary stress, keep in mind these simple psychology principles:

- Thoughts and emotions are not fact
- They are not necessarily true or important
- They are temporary and can be allowed to come and go with a sense of curious observation rather than action.

I read a book a couple of years ago by Thích Nhất Hahn called *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, and this book taught me a very positive (non-religious) thing to think when you are letting your mind go crazy. Whenever I am assuming something, I try to think, "are you sure?". Are you sure that person is thinking that about you? Nope. Then don't waste your time, energy, and happiness by worrying about it.

But hey, we all have negative emotions sometimes, and you can't always make it go away by thinking something like, "are you sure?" At the same time, you don't want to linger on that negative emotion and let it ruin your day. Accepting that emotion can move through you without defending against it is a **release response**. It is also called **decentering**. An example would be feeling irritable in the morning while getting ready to go to school. Rather than insisting that school is stressful or blaming your parents for making you go,



simply acknowledge the emotion by admitting you're cranky and let the uncomfortable feelings move through you. Purposefully release it. When you come out of that cranky fog, put on a smile, and go on with your day. Better yet, give yourself a congratulations for doing a great job getting out the door ready and on time. The *why* you feel a certain way is less important than the *what you need to do now* to change your emotional channel (GKIS, 2021).

While we may usually be able to accept our suffering and move past it, sometimes things get so painful that we cannot stop thinking about them and cannot move past it. It's like our brains won't let it go until it comes upon a solution. But sometimes we are in tough situations where there are no solutions. In those cases, it is healthier to give your brain a break. Ways to distract yourself include:

- Engage in pleasurable activities
- Do acts of service
- Do projects, tasks, and chores – especially if they are creative
- Exercise (GKIS, 2021)

### Task Awareness

You know what it's like when you're trying to concentrate on something, like homework, and your attention keeps drifting away over and over? We all have that experience. It's entirely normal. Monks who practice meditation for decades call it “monkey brain” and describe working with it daily in their meditation practice. Whether you are doing your homework, cleaning your room, eating, or brushing your teeth, mindfulness practice can benefit your ability to manage your monkey brain – making you more productive, self-compassionate, and more peaceful overall.

Try this task awareness exercise:

- Sit down to read a book or an article.
- When you notice your attention drifting, gently guide your thoughts back to task.
- Maintain an attitude of openness, curiosity, and kindness.
- Soak in self-acceptance and allow yourself delicious time in the present.
- Don't worry about your busy, distracted brain. Remember, it's hungry to learn and always on the lookout for excitement.
- By gently guiding it to focus on the task at hand, you exercise it and can strengthen your focus over time.
- Don't beat yourself up, kindly coach yourself to success!
- Practice several times over the next week until successfully attending to the task at hand becomes second nature (GKIS, 2021)

### Meditation and Breathing Techniques

#### *Six Second Belly Breathing*

- Get cozy and sit down at a time when you won't be interrupted. Be sure you are warm and comfortable.
- Close your eyes and establish a smooth and even breathing pattern.
- Place one hand on your chest, the other on your belly. Quietly concentrate on your normal breathing for a few moments noticing which hand is rising and falling with each breath. Which hand moves the most? If you said belly, great.
- If you said chest, then you may have some less-than-optimal breathing habits to overcome. Chest breathing can lead to hyperventilation, which happens when one breathes too fast and upsets the balance between taking in oxygen and breathing out carbon dioxide. Too little carbon dioxide narrows



blood vessels that supply blood to the brain which can lead to uncomfortable symptoms like lightheadedness, dizziness, chest pressure, yawning or belching, and numbness or tingling. Hyperventilating is not dangerous, but it distracts you from the task at hand. Belly breathing is better. If you belly breathe, you achieve that perfect balance between breathing in oxygen and breathing out carbon dioxide. Belly breathing calms the mind and the body.

- Now back to our exercise. Gently place both hands on your belly. This posture will serve as a conditioned cue for your body that relaxation is on its way.
- Close your eyes and breathe deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth. Fill your belly like a balloon with your deep, slow cleansing breath. Focus on the sensation of your breath as it passes through your nostrils.
- Then gently exhale through your mouth for six seconds. Notice the sensation of the exhale on your lips.
- As you take more easy breaths with your 6-second exhale, let your shoulders gently fall away from your ears. Soften your jaw, lips, and tongue.
- Imagine that the air warms and relaxes your body, traveling from your lungs to each body part.
- With each exhale, imagine the word “relax” and note as your tension smoothly flows out of your body with the exhaled air.
- Breathe in easily with six second exhales to the count of ten. In through your nose, out through your mouth if that feels comfortable.
- On quiet occasion, mentally scan your body for tension, breathe into those areas and release.
- Practice belly breathing to the count of three, five, or ten whenever you can until your body easily relaxes on cue.
- If your mind wanders during this exercise, that’s totally OK. Simply guide your attention back to your breath. Don’t get angry or frustrated. Notice your attention with gentle curiosity and gently pull it back to task – like you would gently return a baby bunny to her box.

Along with the belly breathing and 6-second exhales, it helps to use your imagination and visualize as you practice. Here are some ideas to help:

- Imagine on the first inhale that you are gathering in all the stress and tension from the tip of your toes to the top of your head. As you breathe out, imagine the stress escaping into the sky like hot air off concrete. As you breathe in again, melt into your seat.
- Breathe in one color and breath out another.
- Imagine your body slowly filling with soothing color each time you breathe in.
- Imagine your stress level sinking down the scale, landing you into the perfect relaxation zone.

### *Loving Kindness Meditation*

<i>Type of Meditation</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Zen Meditation</i>	This ancient Buddhist tradition involves sitting upright and following the breath, particularly the way it moves in and out of the belly and letting the mind “just be.” Its aim is to foster a sense of presence and alertness.
<i>Mantra Meditation</i>	This technique is similar to focused attention meditation, although instead of focusing on the breath to quiet the mind, you focus on a mantra (which could be a syllable, word, or phrase). The idea here is that the subtle vibrations associated with the repeated mantra can encourage positive change — maybe a boost in self-confidence or increased compassion for others — and help you enter an even deeper state of meditation.

<i>Transcendental Meditation</i>	If you are interested in the Transcendental Meditation® (TM®) program you can visit the Maharishi Foundation's website. The Transcendental Meditation® program is taught one-on-one by instructors trained and licensed by Maharishi Foundation in a
	personalized and individual manner. The practice involves sitting comfortably with one's eyes closed for 20 minutes twice per day and engaging in the effortless practice as instructed. Students are encouraged to practice twice a day, which often includes morning meditation, and a second session is in the mid-afternoon or early evening.
<i>Yoga Meditation</i>	Just as there are many different types of meditation, so too exist many styles of yoga — particularly Kundalini yoga — that are aimed at strengthening the nervous system, so we are better able to cope with everyday stress and problems. However, in order to integrate the neuromuscular changes that happen during yoga and gain the greatest benefit from the practice, we must take time for savasana or Shavasana, known as corpse or relaxation pose, to relax the body and relieve tension.
<i>Vipassana Meditation</i>	Another ancient tradition, this one invites you to use your concentration to intensely examine certain aspects of your existence with the intention of eventual transformation. Vipassana pushes us to find “insight into the true nature of reality,” via contemplation of several key areas of human existence: “suffering, unsatisfactoriness,” “impermanence,” “non-self,” and “emptiness.”
<i>Chakra Meditation</i>	This meditation technique is aimed at keeping the body's core chakras — centers of energy — open, aligned, and fluid. Blocked or imbalanced chakras can result in uncomfortable physical and mental symptoms, but chakra meditation can help to bring all of them back into balance.
<i>Qigong Meditation</i>	This is an ancient and powerful Chinese practice that involves harnessing energy in the body by allowing energy pathways — called “meridians” — to be open and fluid. Sending this energy inward during meditation is thought to help the body heal and function; sending the energy outward can help to heal another person.
<i>Sound Bath Meditation</i>	This form uses bowls, gongs, and other instruments to create sound vibrations that help focus the mind and bring it into a more relaxed state.

## Emotional Fitness

Life is not always easy. All of us face situations that confuse and hurt us and make us feel trapped and helpless. To protect ourselves, we often adopt a number of defenses to help us cope. Sometimes we shut down or lash out, or maybe we isolate or seek support and validation. Usually, our psychological defenses help us cope with the stressor, and we move forward. However, sometimes we overuse defenses or apply them poorly. Stinking thinking is one of these defenses. By concluding that we understand what's happening, and that it's hopeless, we get a much-desired release from uncomfortable feelings.

Sometimes though, we actually make our problems worse by prepping for the worst-case scenario. Radical acceptance is a technique that helps us break out of unhelpful defenses and move forward. By naming that stinking thinking style, you may move toward a more honest appraisal of the situation and opportunity to make progress. Psychologist Dr. Marsha Linehan calls this honesty “radical acceptance.” *Radical acceptance* refers to the process of facing reality head-on and accepting it with your soul, heart, and mind. It doesn't mean you are agreeing with what is happening. It means you will work to move through it rather than staying stuck (GKIS, 2021)

### Exercise:

- Identify a problem that you have struggled with for a while.
- Journal about the problem. Note:
  - when it started, ○ how it makes you feel (scale those feelings), ○ who is typically involved in the problem, and
  - what solutions you have tried. Have you lost confidence due to the challenges involved with this problem?
- With your new understanding of the problem from your journaling exercise, do 10 6-second tummy breaths, work through a progressive muscle relaxation exercise, and close your eyes and sit with the feelings that this problem creates in you.
- Face the feelings with courage and radical acceptance. Sit with them. Feel yourself let go of the hopelessness.
- Once you feel a sense of more calm, open your eyes, and give yourself a much-deserved break. Do something fun and rejuvenating.
- Return to your journaling about the problem later when you have some time and are in the mood. Notice if your perspective has shifted.
- Continue to sit with those feelings overtime. Maybe a solution will reveal itself. Or maybe you'll decide you are OK with no resolution at all (GKIS, 2021)

## The Love of Learning

Before the Internet, it was pretty easy to figure out where a source of news or information came from. Articles were written in newspapers and magazines by trained journalists who shared a code of ethics (rules for being honest and truthful). Research studies were published in professional journals where an accomplished editor vouched for the accuracy of the information. Now with digital publishing (placing information on the Internet – like a website or forum), anybody can say anything. It's very difficult to decide who has credibility (tells the truth and has real expertise) and who is just a random person with an uninformed and maybe even wrong opinion (GKIS, 2021).



## Fake News

Fake news is false information that's often designed to inform opinions and tempt sharing. It could be anything from a rumor, deliberate propaganda, or an unintended error. The main concern of fake news is if the distributor intends to deceive its readers. Widely shared fake news can have all sorts of effects on attitudes and behavior. Fake news about a celebrity may not be harmless, but chances are it won't have a long-lasting and devastating impact. However, fake news about the spread of a virus or the intentions of a politician could have a huge impact by manipulating behavior in dangerous ways.

A recent study found that fake news is 70% more likely to be retweeted than true stories and that a true story takes six times longer to reach 1,500 people than it takes for fake news to reach the same amount of people. Fake news is generally new and unusual information that is tested for shareability. Unlike truth, which you consume and it's over, fake news is alive and constantly evolving. An echo chamber is a metaphor for a closed online space where beliefs are amplified and reinforced through repetition. With each contact with that information, the reader becomes more convinced that the content is factual and impactful (i.e., Parlor, etc.). We form our decisions based on a vague worldview supported by emotional confirmation. We search for facts that make us feel more confident and avoid or flatly reject those that don't. Black-and-white thinking calm our

anxiety and makes us feel like we have more control. Attending to more complicated nuance, which is typically more accurate, takes more cognitive effort and a more informed database to work from. Most don't want to take the time to patiently and humbly build up that kind of expertise. Quick information that offers more successful shareability is a more attractive option for online communication (GKIS, 2021)

### *How to Protect Ourselves from Being Duped by Fake News and Conspiracy Theories*

- **Assess the characteristics of the article you are reading.**
  - Is it an editorial or an opinion piece? Who is the author? Is the author credible? Have they specialized in a certain field or are they just a random guy with an unresearched opinion? Can you trust the information they offer? Do they cite their sources or is the article designed to impress instead of informing?
- **Check the ads.**
  - Be wary of articles containing multiple pop-ups, advertisements of items not associated with the article, or highly provocative and sexual advertisements.
- **Verify images.**
  - Are the images copied from other sources or are they licensed for use by the author? *Google Image Search* is an easy tool to find published copies of the image.
- **Use fact-checking websites.**
  - Snopes, Factcheck.org, and PolitiFact.
- **Research opposing views.**
  - Check out sources with viewpoints opposing the articles you read that differ from your own opinions. To defend a point of view, you must understand the other side.
- **Learn to tolerate several complex ideas at once, even if it causes some tension.**
  - Smart discussion requires that we discuss the nuance of complex ideas rather than engaging in faulty or black-and-white thinking. Experts are not shy to say they don't know something. Insecure amateurs try to fake it.
- **Share responsibly.**

As important as it is to protect yourself from fake news, it is equally important to help protect others from fake news. Make sure to check the authenticity of an article before posting it online.

### Citations

GKIS. (2021, February 24). Social media Readiness Course. GetKidsInternetSafe.  
<https://getkidsinternetsafe.com/social-media-readiness-course/>.