

Your online life *Thrive*

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**I was addicted
to my phone!**

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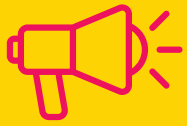
You asked, we answered

Your problems
solved with Matt

ARE YOU SOCIAL
MEDIA OBSESSED?

**Take our
quick quiz**

The
Fostering
Network



Get the lowdown...

Hello!

In this issue of Thrive, we're bringing you more real-life experiences and expert advice on social media, coping with fear of missing out - FOMO - and life online.

These days, everyone's on social media. Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Facebook and Snapchat are great ways of staying in touch and sharing what you're up to, but sometimes they can cause problems like anxiety and cyberbullying.

This is the second edition of Thrive that we've focused on this topic - because it's so important. It's packed with stories, info and tips on how to cope with all of this and how to make the most of your social media life. You can find the first edition at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/thrive.

Remember - the internet can be amazing - but it's good to step away from it every now and then too!

Thanks for reading - until next time!

Thrive xxx

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A big up to...

NYAS Caerphilly Shout Out; Fairwater Bright Sparks; Whitchurch High School Cardiff, Reaching Wider Swansea and Voices from Care Cymru. You all live with the reality of fostering day in, day out. Without your contributions, we just couldn't create this mag. Thank you!

The Fostering Network



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'My foster dad doesn't understand social media at all and limits my time online. It makes me feel left out because all my friends are talking about the stuff they do on Snapchat.'

Rhiannon, 16



'It was so sad saying goodbye to my foster family, especially my foster sister Emma, we had got so close. It's great that we can keep in touch via WhatsApp.'

Lucy, 16



Have your say

What does social media mean to you and your family?



'I've moved foster homes a lot and I like WhatsApp for keeping in touch with the mates I've left behind. Once I'm in my group chats and sharing jokes and pictures, I feel less lonely and part of something again.'

Martin, 15



'I find it hard seeing my Dad in person, he lives so far away. We have found a new way of keeping in touch. At the weekends, we play Xbox Live for a couple of hours. We chat a lot online and play together.'

Will, 15



'Once I start scrolling through Instagram, the time just disappears. Sometimes I feel it's taking over, but everyone in my family is so busy that sometimes they don't notice how much time I spend online.'

Jenna, 13

Real life:

I was addicted to my phone

Josh, 14, has moved around a lot in the last few years. Recently, he found himself checking his phone more and more to see what was going on. He got so into it that it affected his sleep and his concentration. After a big row with his foster family, he realised that he needed help.

Can you tell us how you got so into checking your phone all the time?

It was probably after the fourth time I'd moved to a new foster family and changed schools yet again. I was trying really hard to stay in touch with my old friends with WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter. I became obsessed with trying to keep up with everyone online – my schoolwork went downhill and I fell out with my foster mum.

What was the lowest point of your phone addiction?

The biggest problem for me was wanting to get Snapstreaks on Snapchat – that's when you and a friend send Snaps to each other all the time without missing a day. Sometimes I stayed awake until 4am doing it. I know now that they don't really mean anything, they're not true friendships, but I felt so anxious to keep my streaks going. Now I know that apps like Snapchat make us feel like we have to respond, and we feel guilty if we don't, then it becomes this huge pressure.

So how did this affect your life?

I didn't sleep much and couldn't concentrate on anything. I didn't want to have real chats with my friends and they started ignoring me. I was worried that I was letting my foster family, teachers and friends down, but didn't know how to stop.

When did you realise you needed help?

My foster carers have really strict rules about screen time, but I couldn't cope with it. I was so desperate to keep my streaks going that I kept arguing and I was really angry. One day I had such a big row with my foster mum that we both got really upset. My foster mum said she wanted to help me, and I knew that I had to let her.

How do you manage your phone time now?

I make sure to have time away from my phone each day and I deleted a few of my apps. It sounds silly, but sometimes I'll give my phone to my foster mum to look after when I'm doing homework or watching TV, just so the temptation isn't there. We've also set a night-time limit from 10pm until 7am – I sometimes ignore it, but it's nowhere near as bad as it used to be!

What would you say to others in the same situation?

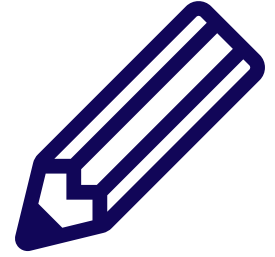
I know how hard it is to switch off, but it's really important to try. I wish I hadn't lost so much time to my phone. You can't help feeling pressurised, but you have to take care of yourself too.



We're so glad Josh is feeling better now. If you or anyone you know spends too much time on their phone, ask for help from your foster carer or a teacher. You can also call **Childline** on **0800 1111** or visit **www.thinkuknow.co.uk**

Quiz:

Are you OBSESSED with social media?



From TikTok to Instagram and Twitter, maybe you've got an account for them all. But do you think you could go without checking your photo comments, sharing memes and likes for an hour, a day, a month, for good? Take this quiz to find out if you're spending too much time online and need to jump back in to the real world.

1. How much time do you spend on your phone every day?

- a) Less than 2 hours
- b) 2-4 hours
- c) I never put my phone down!

2. How many different social media sites (like Instagram, TikTok or Snapchat) do you have accounts for?

- a) Just one
- b) Between two and four
- c) More than four

3. How many celebs do you check every day online?

- a) A handful
- b) Ten or so
- c) Too many to count!

4. Do you compare your life with others based on their social media posts?

- a) No - I know they're faking it!
- b) Sometimes I feel like some of my friends are having a better time than me because they're always doing nice things.
- c) After a few minutes of scrolling I always feel so down - my posts never look as good or get as many likes.

5. What do you do if you're not looking at social media?

- a) I do lots of other stuff like sport and going to clubs.
- b) I love chatting with my friends and family, but my phone is always pinging nearby.
- c) There is NOTHING to do if it's not looking at social media!

WHAT DID YOU SCORE?

Mostly As:

You know about social media, but you love to do other stuff too - keep it up!

Mostly Bs:

You're tech-savvy, but you've got a healthy balance of life online and offline - but be careful not to get drawn into too much social media in the future.

Mostly Cs:

Yes, you're social media-obsessed! Try putting your phone down and exploring the outside world a bit more - you might like it!

Living lies

The myths and real

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Social media started as a way of connecting people with their friends and family with just one click. So even if your bestie moved to a foster family miles away, you could still feel close to them through photo-sharing, videos and messages. Now it has become a way of comparing everything - lifestyles, appearances, fashion, hobbies - and it can be hard if you think you don't measure up.



FOMO

Fear of Missing Out - aka FOMO - is a very real issue when it comes to social media. A simple scroll through Instagram could make you feel low or sad because your friends are enjoying a fun day out or going to see your favourite band. Recently, a study of young people said that those who use social media a lot were three times more likely to feel down and miserable than those who use it less often. Remember, seeing too much of other people's 'perfect' lives can be bad for you.

HAPPY SMILEY PEOPLE

Everyone tends to look so happy, don't they? It may seem like they're living their best lives and it only takes a second to smile, pose and choose a filter, but it doesn't mean that person is having a great time, all of the time.



ities of social media

CRAVING LIKES

Of course, it's OK to want to share what you're doing and use social media as a way of keeping family and friends up to date with your life. But don't get stressed out about the number of likes you've got or whether that cute guy or girl has commented on your latest picture.

CYBERBULLYING

Posting too much online can attract negative comments as well as likes and compliments. It can sometimes lead to cyberbullying too. Try to remember that the most important thing is to like and respect yourself first!



TRUE OR FALSE?

Most people – including your fave celebrities – like to show the highlights from their lives, rather than the boring, everyday stuff. In fact, we usually post when we're on a high and feeling good, and we scroll other people's feeds when we're bored or a bit low. Seeing so much 'perfection' when you're already feeling down can make you feel worse.

HOW CAN I GET HELP?

If social media is making you feel down – give yourself a break! Don't pick up your phone to look at it AGAIN, go and to play with that little kid in your foster family, stroke the dog, kick a football around or tell your foster carer what happened at school (you know how much they're always asking you about it!).

If you're feeling really down, ask for help – your foster carers and your social worker are there to support you!





Q I don't have lots of friends. I'm on Snapchat and WhatsApp with some friends at my new school, but now I keep checking my phone all the time for messages and notifications and worrying when I don't hear from anyone for a bit. What's wrong with me?

Matt says: Our mobile phones bring us lots of good things, but they can be bad for us too and we need to learn how to make the best of them.

It's great you recognise that you're getting into a few bad habits, so here are some practical suggestions to help you check your phone a bit less often:

Tell your friends you are working on being in control of your phone rather than the other way around. Let them know that you're not going to reply immediately all the

time - because you've got better things to do!

Don't check your messages all the time, but instead set your alarm to remind you to check, say, only every two hours. And turn your phone off when you go to bed.

Try turning off some alerts and notifications so your phone isn't buzzing crazily all the time. Just head to Settings > Notifications to control your preferences.

In breaking habits, it's difficult to get the right balance, so don't expect to feel sorted overnight - it's something you're going to have to think about for a long time yet!



Why am I so anxious?

A PROBLEM SHARED

Ask Matt...



Q Since I joined Instagram last year, I have lost all my confidence. I used to not worry too much about my appearance or what others think and have. But now I feel really jealous when I see what my friends are up to and how amazing all the celebrities' lives are.

Matt says: It is only natural to compare ourselves with what we see online, but the reality is there are always other people who have what seem to be much more exciting lives.

Remember, those people who work hard to gain publicity probably aren't showing their true lives online. They spend hours setting up pictures, doing their hair and make-up and then posting only the very best images.

You can enjoy what they're showing you, but remember they're often being paid and they are carefully developing an online image. Don't let their fake lives affect how you think about your life - try to remember all the good things that you have too!

I can't stop comparing

I feel like a zombie!



Q I moved to a new foster home last month and I'm worried I'm getting addicted to gaming. I get really fidgety when I'm not gaming and I think about it all the time. I've been staying up late too and it's really hard to get up for school. Help!

Matt says: Being aware of your current situation is a good place to start. It's important to be kind to yourself and recognise that many teens have similar worries.

There's probably a lot going on for you – it's not just about gaming too much, but you've just moved foster home and you're also feeling tired and maybe bored.

Remember, there are a lot of people who can help you out. Your social worker, advocate, foster carers, school year head or counsellor, your friends and former foster family. Think about having a chat with someone about all the things you're going through at the moment, not just your worries about gaming.

You can also raise these issues with your Independent Reviewing Officer (aka IRO) before your next review and, if you don't go to this review meeting, your advocate can raise them for you.

Be patient and resourceful as some of these issues take time to resolve.

In the meantime, ask your foster carer to help you find alternatives to gaming, maybe an activity you are good at, one that taps into your strengths and talents, like a sport or a club.

Got a problem? Get an answer you can trust, right here

Trolling shame

Q I was really angry that I had to leave my mum and live with foster carers. I started trolling somebody in my class. It felt really good to see her cry and to see someone else having a bad time. But then I found out that she has started missing school and now I feel really bad – it wasn't supposed to go that far.

Matt says: I'm sorry that you felt so angry when you had to move to live with foster carers. That can't have been an easy time for you. All of us, at some time, have to deal with a lot of difficult situations and emotions. For some people, when they're feeling stressed, angry, or frustrated, picking on someone else can be an easy escape – it takes the attention away from them and their problems. Whatever the reason, though, it's no excuse for being an online troll, and it's good that you've recognised that.

If you find it hard to resist the temptation to post, you might want to talk with someone you look up to such as your foster carer, a school counsellor or your social worker. Try to think about how others feel when you tease or hurt them. Bullying always backfires, can often result in things you might not expect, and makes everyone feel miserable – even you. People might feel scared of trolls, but they don't respect them. It's important that you get help for yourself rather than take it out on others.



My filtered life

Cara, 16, tells us about her struggle with oversharing on Instagram and why she decided to stop living her life for 'likes'.

If you'd told me this time last year that I would delete Instagram and never want to use it again, I wouldn't have believed you. But it took something really embarrassing to make me realise I was living a fake life online and it had to stop.



A bit of a laugh

My 13-year-old foster brother, Danny, joined Instagram before I did. He told me about it and it seemed like a bit of a laugh. I liked seeing what was going on – not just with my mates but with celebrities too.

I was into running and I started following a few fitness accounts on Instagram.

There's a beautiful park nearby and I'd run there, stopping to take pics to post on Instagram. I started getting a bit carried away and the more people liked my posts, the more I wanted to impress them.

A need for likes

Then after a few months, I began losing my motivation for running, but I still wanted those likes and compliments.

One morning, I couldn't face running, but I had to post a photo – sharing my fitness stuff had become an obsession. I did my make-up, got in

all my running gear and asked my foster mum to take some snaps of me. I filtered the pics and posted them with a caption about how brilliant my run was – and that I'd smashed my personal best too.

But I didn't know that Danny had been watching. He took photos of our foster mum taking photos of me posing in the garden. He posted them on his Twitter and Instagram with some snarky comments and tagged me.

It was so humiliating

Soon enough, my phone was going crazy. I was so humiliated. I hid under my duvet and cried my eyes out – the whole world was laughing at me, or so it seemed.

To this day, he hasn't said sorry because he thinks I was wrong to make up stuff in the first place. He's right, but that doesn't mean what he did is ok, I never meant to hurt anyone. My foster carers have been really supportive and encouraged me to delete my app and have a break from social media.

It's been the best advice. Now I'm getting over how totally embarrassed I felt, my friends don't talk about it any more, and I'm moving on.

