



Digital Overload & How to Cope: **The effects of digital engagement** **on mental health and how** **to manage it**



Created by ARC and local teens to help you
balance life online – and protect your
mental health.

Why this matters

Let's be honest: the internet isn't going anywhere.

Social media, streaming, gaming, messaging apps, notifications—it's all a huge part of teenage life.

For parents, this can feel confusing. Technology has changed faster than any generation before us. In just a few years, teens went from texting to TikTok, from school books to AI homework hacks, from real-life meet-ups to Snap Maps and streaks.

For teens, online life isn't just about scrolling—it's about belonging.

It's where you talk, share, joke, date, game, and hang out. But it can also be where you compare yourself to others, feel left out, get stuck in doomscroll loops, or face bullying.

⚡ The Problem? Digital Overload

Phones don't come with "off switches" for your brain.

Constant connection = constant stimulation. And that can lead to:

- Anxiety & stress
- Sleep problems
- Low self-esteem (thanks, comparison culture)
- Feeling stuck in a cycle of checking apps even when you don't want to
- Burnout—yes, that's a thing for social media too



How Digital Overload Affects Your Mental Health

Phones, games, socials—they're not “bad.”

But when you're constantly plugged in, your brain doesn't get downtime to reset. Over time, that can lead to:

Dopamine Loops (aka why it's hard to stop scrolling)

Your brain loves rewards. Every like, snap, or streak gives you a tiny hit of dopamine—a feel-good chemical that makes you want more.

That's why it's so easy to get stuck in endless scroll mode, even when you're tired or bored. But too much of this messes with your brain's natural balance, making it harder to feel good from everyday life.

Anxiety & Panic

Notifications, messages, friend counts, read receipts—your phone keeps you on alert. This can lead to:

- Social anxiety (What if I don't reply fast enough?)
- FOMO (What if something happens and I miss it?)
- Fear of judgement (What if they leave me on read?)

Over time, that can cause real stress symptoms like chest tightness, headaches, and racing thoughts.

Sleep Problems

Blue light from screens confuses your body clock.

Your brain thinks it's daytime, even at 11pm.

The result? You get less deep sleep, which makes:

- Mood dips worse
- Concentration harder
- Anxiety louder the next day



How Digital Overload Affects Your Mental Health 🧠

📱 Comparison Culture

Social media is basically a highlight reel. You're seeing the best bits of everyone else's life—not the full story.

This can lead to:

- Body image struggles
- Feeling left out
- Thinking you're "behind" compared to other people
- Low self-worth (even when you know the pics are filtered)

🧠 Mental Fog & Burnout

Too much online time can actually exhaust your brain. You might feel:

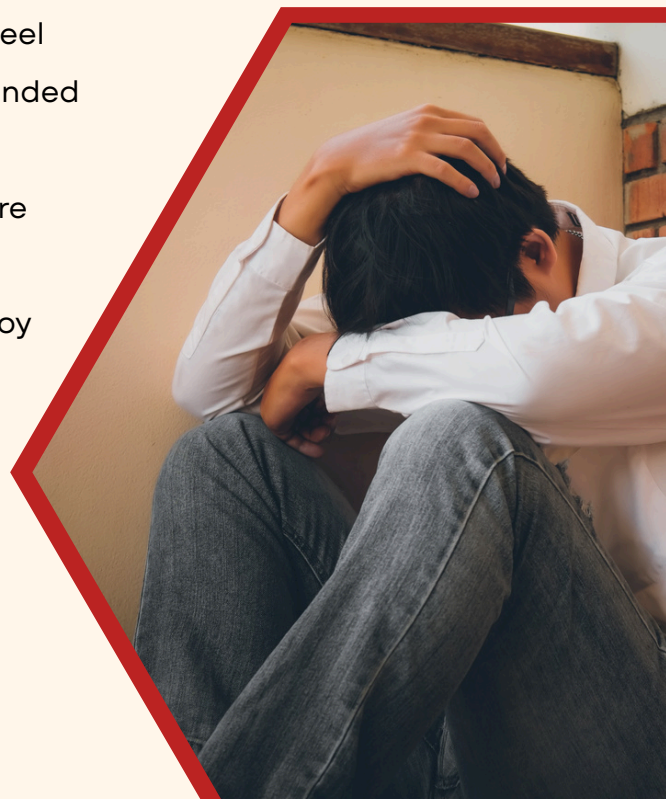
- Restless but drained
- Zoning out in real life
- Struggling to focus in class or on homework
- Overwhelmed by tiny decisions

This isn't just "laziness." It's digital burnout.

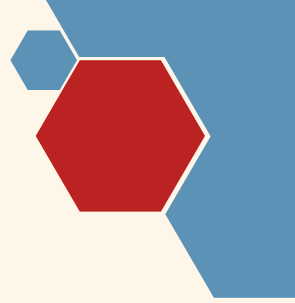
😞 Disconnection from Real Life

When your world happens mostly online, it's easy to feel disconnected from real life—even when you're surrounded by people. This can look like:

- Feeling distant from friends or family (even if you're in the same room)
- Losing interest in offline activities you used to enjoy
- Social media arguments or friendship dramas becoming your main source of connection
- Loneliness—even though you're technically "talking" to people all day



Your Digital Coping Kit



The Tech Timeout

When to use it: If you're doomscrolling, feeling anxious, or losing track of time.

Try this:

- Put your phone in another room for 20 minutes.
- Do something offline: music, stretch, walk, chat to someone IRL.
- Set a timer—then check how you feel after.

 **Why it works: Your brain gets space to reset.**

Create a “Night Mode” Routine

When to use it: If you're scrolling late at night and can't sleep.

Try this:

- Put your phone on Do Not Disturb 30 minutes before bed.
- Try a sleep app like Headspace or Calm (instead of TikTok).
- Use blue-light filters or switch to “dark mode.”

 **Why it works: Better sleep = better mood and more energy tomorrow.**

Try a “Digital Diary”

When to use it: If you're not sure how your phone is affecting your mood.

Try this for 3 days:

- Write down how you feel after using each app.
- Ask yourself: Did this make me feel better or worse?
- Use that info to change what (and who) you follow.

 **Why it works: You'll learn to spot patterns—and protect your peace.**



You Are Not Alone

Online Pressure & Mental Health

- 1 in 3 UK teens say social media makes them feel worse about themselves (YoungMinds, 2023)
- 70% of young people have tried to cut back on screen time—but find it hard to stick to. (YoungMinds, 2023)
- Nearly 40% of teens say phone use makes their anxiety worse. (Mental Health Foundation, 2022)
- More than half of young people feel like they can't switch off from the online world—even when it's stressful. (Ofcom Children & Parents Media Use Report, 2024)

Loneliness & Digital Life

- 88% of 16–24-year-olds say they feel lonely at least sometimes—even though they're constantly connected. (BBC Campaign to End Loneliness, 2023)
- Almost half of teens feel lonely even while chatting on social media. (YoungMinds, 2022)
- 70% of LGBTQ+ young people say online spaces help them find community—but many still feel isolated offline. (Just Like Us LGBTQ+ Report, 2023)
- 1 in 4 boys aged 13–18 report feeling socially isolated when online chats replace real-life friendships. (Action for Children, 2023)

Friendship & Identity

- 54% of teens have friends they only know online—this can be positive, but sometimes leads to fewer face-to-face connections. (Ofcom Children & Parents Media Use Report, 2024)
- 42% of young people say they find it easier to be themselves online, but also feel more anxious in person because of it. (Youth Voice Census, 2023)

When Online Life Crosses the Line 🚨

Bullying, Consent & Knowing When to Speak Up

Most people use social media, gaming and group chats to have fun, share stuff, and stay connected. However, sometimes, online life can cross a line. It's not always easy to spot when that happens. Sometimes it builds up slowly. Sometimes you don't realise it's a problem until you're feeling anxious, trapped, or overwhelmed.

🧠 Bullying & Online Stress: The Facts

- 45% of teens have experienced cyberbullying, trolling, or harassment. (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2023)
- LGBTQ+ teens are twice as likely to experience online bullying compared to straight/cisgender peers. (Stonewall School Report, 2022)
- 60% of girls and young women say social media affects how they feel about their appearance. (Girlguiding UK, 2023)
- 1 in 5 teen boys say online gaming arguments or pressure affect their mood in real life. (Internet Matters, 2023)

🚩 Signs It's Time to Speak to Someone

If you're dealing with any of this, you don't have to handle it alone:

- Getting constant mean messages or DMs
- Being pressured to send photos or share stuff you're uncomfortable with
- Group chats that gang up, tease, or leave you out on purpose
- Screenshots or private stuff being shared without your consent
- Online arguments or games that leave you feeling shaky, upset, or not safe
- Feeling like you "can't log off" without losing friends



When Online Life Crosses the Line 🚨

🔴 Mute, Block, Report

If someone's making you feel uncomfortable, harassed, or unsafe online.

Try this:

- Mute: Stops you seeing their content without confrontation.
- Block: Stops them contacting you at all.
- Report: Use the platform's report tool for harassment, threats, or bullying.

💡 **Why it works: You control who gets access to you. Not the other way around.**

👤 Talk to Someone

If online life is making you feel isolated, anxious, or unsafe.

Try this:

- Text a friend or trusted adult:

“Hey, online stuff's been getting to me lately—can we talk?”

- Speak to a school counsellor or contact ARC.
- If you ever feel in danger, call Childline (0800 1111) or Samaritans (116 123).

💡 **Why it works: You don't have to carry this alone.**

🔑 Consent Isn't Just About Relationships

Consent online means:

- No one has the right to pressure you into sending messages or pictures you don't want to send.
- You control what you share and who sees it.
- If you change your mind? That's okay. Consent can be withdrawn at any time.

💬 Final Reminder

If it's messing with your mental health, it's always okay to ask for help—even if you think “it's not a big deal.” Small things can add up.

You deserve to feel safe, online and offline.





Get in touch



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ARC offers one-to-one counselling to Adults and Young People across Wokingham and the surrounding areas. We provide confidential counselling at our main site in Wokingham, Oakwood in Woodley, schools and GP surgeries across the area.

ARC provides an important role within the community, with referrals coming from other agencies as well as self-referrals.

In addition to counselling, we also offer important support for 16 – 25 year olds through our Youth Access program. This program provides information to young people on where and how to access support, from housing, to work and mental health.

Our counselling services are free to young people under the age of 21 years and low cost for adults. We believe that counselling should be accessible for all and that cost should never be a barrier to better mental health.

We are a charity with over 25 years offering support within the Wokingham area.