Chasing Likes, Losing Joy:
The Truth About Influencer Culture, Consumerism & Mental Wellbeing.

Created by ARC and local people to help you feel more in control when life feels overwhelming.

Why this matters

We live in a world where trends spread faster than ever, and many are designed to make you spend. From “must-have” skincare routines to the latest fashion drops, what shows up on your For You Page isn’t always there by chance. It’s advertising, even when it doesn’t look like it.

Behind every "you need this!" post is a profit motive. Influencers, brands, and content creators rely on your clicks, envy, and spending. The illusion of wealth, perfection, and effortless success fuels a cycle of comparison, self-doubt, and overconsumption.
At the same time, mental health struggles like anxiety, low mood, burnout, and a feeling of never being enough are rising.

This guide is here to help you:

- Understand how social media is designed to sell
- Spot the signs of simulated wealth and fake “lifestyles”
- Explore how this impacts your mental wellbeing
- Build awareness of your real values, goals, and purpose
- Develop a healthier relationship with money and self-worth
- Reconnect with your strengths, not your shopping basket

You're not behind. You're just being sold an illusion.

Let’s unpack it...

🎯 The Business of Envy

When you feel like you're not enough, there's often someone making money from that feeling. Influencers create "relatable" content that sells aspiration. They show hauls, glow-ups, and morning routines designed to look achievable, but built on filters, edits, and free gifted products.

You see their lifestyle and think: "If I had that, I'd be happy."

But here's what's missing:

- They earn commission or ad revenue when you click
- Wealth is often simulated or staged
- Posts are edited, filtered, and scripted
- Their job is to make you want what they have

💰 **Influencers are in the business of envy. The more you compare, the more you spend. The more you spend, the richer they become.**

And yet...

- Buying stuff doesn't build confidence
- Followers don't guarantee happiness
- Aesthetics don't equal worth

Comparison is natural, but constant comparison is exhausting. And it's affecting how people (not just young people!) feel about themselves – often in ways they don't even realise.

🔍 **Spot the tricks:**

- #AD or #Gifted tags
- "Limited edition" or "Drops" to create panic buying
- Renting outfits, props or locations to fake wealth

It's a show – and you're the audience.

🧠 Impact on Mental Health

The constant stream of highlight reels and “perfect” lives can:

- Make you feel like your everyday life isn’t enough
- Lead to low self-worth, or feeling you don’t “measure up”
- Create pressure to perform or present a certain way online
- Fuel anxiety, overthinking, or compulsive scrolling

And when everyone else seems to be “winning” – getting deals, glow-ups, and dream lives – it’s easy to feel like you’re falling behind. But you’re not behind. You’re just being bombarded.

Spending hours scrolling, comparing, and trying to “keep up” can take a toll on how you feel, even if you don’t realise it right away.

You might notice:

- Feeling “not good enough”
- Wanting to constantly buy the next trending thing
- Getting annoyed with your real life because it doesn’t look like what you see online
- Feeling left out if your body, skin, home or status don’t match the aesthetic
- Worrying about how many likes or views you get

This isn’t just “social media being social.” It’s consumer culture dressed up as connection.

🧠 **Tip: If you’re feeling worse after using social media – not better – that’s your brain telling you something.**

💸 Consumerism vs Real Value

Having nice things isn't the problem. Believing you need them to be worthy? That's where it gets dangerous.
Most of what's trending now will be irrelevant next month. Instead of chasing ever-changing stuff, ask yourself:

- Do I really want this, or does it feel like I should?
- Will I still care about this next week?
- Would I buy this if no one ever saw it on me?

Instead of chasing ever-changing stuff, try asking:

- What do I actually enjoy?
- What makes me feel proud or excited?
- What do I want to be remembered for?

Real value comes from the skills you develop, people you support, work you do, ideas you create and time spent doing things that matter. You can't shop your way to self-worth.

✨ The Rise of De-Influencing

Believe it or not, some creators are pushing back – telling people what NOT to buy.
"De-influencing" is all about:

- Rejecting trends
- Exposing overhyped products
- Encouraging followers to spend mindfully

🧼 Even creators are starting to admit: we don't need 12-step skincare, £100 leggings, or another £5 lip gloss to be "that person."

✅ **You don't have to delete social media, just stop letting it decide your worth.**

🧠 Think About This...

If everyone became an influencer, who would:

- Teach? Like the inspiring teacher shaping young minds and futures
- Build? Like the architect designing homes and eco-buildings
- Heal? Like the GP, therapist or nurse supporting real lives
- Protect? Like the firefighter or youth worker keeping people safe
- Repair? Like the mechanic or IT engineer keeping the world running
- Create? Like the game dev, filmmaker, or designer making things with depth and purpose

🌍 The world needs more than trends. It needs skills, heart, and action.

Here's some examples:

🏆 A footballer might have an amazing house, car and brand deal – but their legacy is their skill, discipline, teamwork, and performance on the pitch.

🎸 Your favourite music producer may have millions of followers – but it's the years of practice behind the scenes that built their success.

🎮 A game designer might not be famous, but their creativity builds worlds others escape into.

🎨 An artist might never go viral, but their work can spark change, emotion, and connection that lasts decades.

💡 An inventor might not be known on TikTok, but their ideas can quietly change the way the world works – forever.

🚜 A farmer won't show up in your FYP, but their work literally puts food on the table.

You don't need to be famous to be fulfilled.

🧘‍♀️ Get to Know YOU

Before the algorithm tells you who to be, pause and ask:

- Who am I really?
- What excites me?
- What makes you lose track of time (in a good way)?
- What kind of people do I enjoy being around?
- What skills come naturally to me?

🧠 **Try This: Mindful Self-Discovery**

- Write down five things that make you feel calm, confident, or proud
- Make a "Me Map" – values, strengths, interests, and ideas that make you you
- Try a mindfulness activity (like Headspace, Calm or simple breathing exercises)

The more time you spend learning about yourself, the less time you'll waste trying to copy someone else.

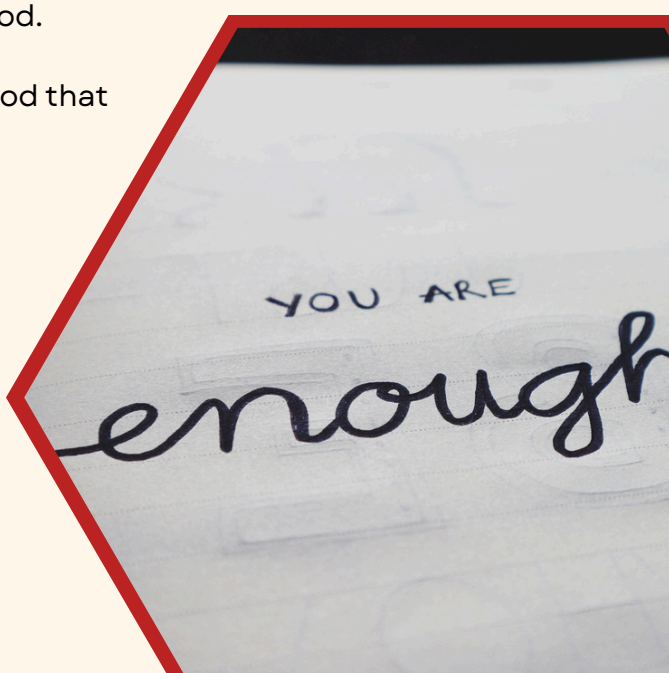
Try This: Exercises

🔳 **Money Diary:** Write down what you spend this week. Highlight anything driven by pressure or boredom.

📱 **Scroll Audit:** Go through your feed. Unfollow anything that makes you feel less than. Find creators who teach, inspire, or make you feel good.

💬 **Value Check:** List five things that make you feel good that don't cost anything.

🎓 **Career Vision Board:** Build a board (on paper or digitally) with jobs or goals that excite you – not ones made to impress others.



Did You Know?

- 93% of UK teens use YouTube, 90% use TikTok, and 73% use Instagram, where **consumer culture is embedded in content** (Ofcom, 2023)
- **The average teenager sees between 4000–10,000 ads per day**, many disguised as content. (Common Sense Media, 2023)
- **More than half of teens say they compare their appearance to influencers online**, often leading to lower self-esteem. (Dove/Self-Esteem Project, 2023)
- **One in four teens in the UK say social media makes them feel "not good enough"** about their life. (Youthscape, 2022)
- **40% of TikTok users report FOMO** (fear of missing out) when they can't afford trending items (Ditch the Label, 2023)
- **Nearly 70% of UK teens say they've compared their life or appearance** to an influencer and felt worse afterward (Girlguiding UK, 2023)
- **60% of Gen Z say they've considered becoming influencers** as a career. (Morning Consult, 2023)
- **61% of young people in the UK say influencer content has made them feel insecure** about their body image (Mental Health Foundation, 2023)
- **More than a third of teens say they've bought a product they later regretted,** influenced by social media hype
- **Trend cycles are getting shorter**, with many viral items becoming "outdated" within weeks
- **Influencer marketing is a £1.7 billion industry in the UK** – and it's growing fast. But most influencers make less than minimum wage, and only a tiny percentage 'make it'. (Statista, 2023 / CNBC)

A Note to Parents

Older generations had different economic realities than young people may face today. For example:

- Housing, rent and bills cost more
- Wages haven't kept up with inflation
- University and training can be expensive
- AI reshaping the job market

📈 The truth is, the economy has changed. The world young people are growing into is potentially more competitive, expensive, and uncertain. But that doesn't mean the youth today are stuck.

They can still thrive – by playing smart.

✅ Skill up. Practice something real – from fixing bikes to editing videos to coding.
✅ Stay curious. Watch, read, learn. You don't need to be in school to grow.
✅ Say yes to opportunities. Volunteer. Try. Shadow. Even small things lead to big change.
✅ Understand money. Learn about budgeting, saving, earning – it's power.
✅ Focus on purpose. Think long-term. Who do you want to become?

It's important to help young people to understand that they don't need a million followers to live a successful life, and success doesn't have to be loud. Quiet purpose is just as powerful.

What helps:

- Talk about the difference between content and marketing
- Be curious, not critical
- Share your values around money and hard work
- Encourage creativity and exploration
- Celebrate effort and kindness over aesthetics or status

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.