

# Take Control of Your Social Media Use



*How do I shift my use of social media for good?*

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## OBJECTIVE

Make a successful change in how you use social media by setting goals and working with others.

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## PART

## Why shift your use of social media?

# 1

Have you ever had a song stuck in your head? Even when you were tired of it, even when thinking about it didn't make you happy, it was still there. Maybe that made it harder to focus, like your brain was caught in a loop that you just wanted to escape from.

Social media is like a song that the smartest computers in the world are constantly making catchier. It can feel great to listen to, but it can also hijack our minds. It can pull some of us into loops of scrolling that last hours, even when we don't want them to. Most importantly, by hijacking our attention it pulls our minds away from other things we could be focusing on—things that really matter.

When we pay attention to one thing, we're not paying attention to something else.

If our free attention automatically moves to our social media, then we may miss when a friend needs us. We may miss a creative thought that could turn into something incredible. We may forget to follow through on the promises we make to ourselves. When we're robbed of our attention, we lose the power to control our own destiny.

Our days, our weeks, our years, and ultimately our lives are made up of what we pay attention to, one moment at a time.

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## CONSIDER:

<p>”</p> <p>I started to back away from social media and just live my life and I feel free. I don't have to worry about other people's validation in my life and I can just be who I want to be and live my life the way I want to live my life.</p> <p><i>Daniel, 18, Englewood, United States</i></p>	<p>”</p> <p>Deleting my Facebook and Instagram accounts has completely changed my lifestyle, my thoughts, my days, everything!</p> <p><i>Konstantina, 23, Athens, Greece</i></p>
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These stories are examples of experiences from young people who have shifted their use of social media. (You can find more at [socialtruth.humanetech.com](http://socialtruth.humanetech.com).)

1. Why do you think changing their social media habits has had such a positive impact on them?

2. How do you think changing the amount of time they spend on social media has affected what they have or haven't been paying attention to?



While each of our experiences is different, these platforms are designed to compete for your attention and can hijack your behavior to accomplish their goals. Even if you feel that your time on social media is mostly well spent, it's important to carefully consider the facts and take control of your usage in whatever way works best for you.

Here are a few important steps you can take right now to increase your well being and regain control.

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## **PART**

## **What's the best way to get started?**

# 2

There are lots of reasons to take control of your social media use. Before diving into exactly how you'll make a change, it's important to get clear about why you want to make a change.

## **GET CLEAR ABOUT YOUR “WHY”:**


These questions will help you think about the possibilities you want to open up by shifting your tech use. Your answers will be the foundation for what you do next.

1. What are some reasons that you use social media?

2. What are some unwanted impacts that social media has on your life?

3. What do you wish you had more time for in your day-to-day life?

4. What big goals are you working toward that you would like to have more time and energy for?



5. Are there behaviors and/or relationships you would like to improve?



Now look at your answers. Taking back control means that you get only the things you really need from social media and aren't distracted by the things that you don't. It means making time for what really matters to you.

Sometimes that means you log on to social media for a specific purpose, logging off right afterward. Sometimes it means you use social media less. And sometimes it means you replace social media with other ways of communicating that don't try to hijack your attention.

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Now that you have a sense of *why* you'd like to shift your social media use, it's time to look at *how* you can make changes. Consider Adelina's experiences:

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I would go through periods where I would have kept the app off my phone for weeks, only to decide to download it late one night, and not be able to delete it for another month. The app made me feel so horrible, but somehow I could not stop.

*Adelina, 14, Scottsdale, United States*

Because social media is designed to keep you coming back, stories like Adelina’s are common. Even with the best intentions, we can have weak moments and get sucked back in. That’s why it’s important to **set realistic, attainable goals**. It’s also helpful to tackle goals with the help of friends or family—we’ll discuss that later in this guide.

For some, totally eliminating social media is an attainable goal. But for others, something more specific may be helpful. To set a goal that works for you, think about:

- ➔ Is my goal about a set period of time? For example:
  - I will stay off of my phone from dinnertime to bedtime.
  - I will stay off of social media on Saturdays.
- ➔ Is my goal about specific habits on a specific platform? For example:
  - I will stop using streaks on Snapchat.
  - I will turn off notifications on Instagram.
  - I will limit my screen time on TikTok to an hour a week.
- ➔ Do I want to totally eliminate a platform from my life? Or just significantly reduce time on specific platforms? For example:
  - I will remove TikTok from my phone for good.
  - I will track my screen time on Instagram for a week and then work to reduce it.

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- Is my goal about working to change my behavior online? For example:
  - My goal is to be more compassionate when I'm online. Whenever I'm about to post, I will take a deep breath and think about why I'm posting, and what the person on the other side of the screen might be experiencing.
  
- Consider what you're replacing social media with, and keep your "why" in mind. For example:
  - Instead of using Snapchat, I will message my friends when I want to chat with them. By pulling back from getting sucked into Snapchat, I will be able to focus on getting better at basketball.
  - I will finish using my phone by 8:00 PM to give my mind more time to wind down and get a good night's sleep.
  
- Do I want to try out my goal for a short amount of time, or is it something I think I can do for longer? For example:
  - I will remove TikTok from my phone for two weeks and then reflect on what the best goal is for me for the long-term.

What's important is that you're setting a strong goal that works best for you.

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## **SET YOUR GOAL(S):**

1. Write out your goal(s) in detail.

2. Keep your list of goals someplace prominent in your life: above your desk, on your fridge, or in your go-to notebook.
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## PART

## How do I keep with it?

# 3

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I have disabled my account for months on end and feel GREAT and productive and free without the app. However, as soon as I get it back I fall back into my old ways.

*Ana, 20, Elizabethtown, United States*

Social media relies on our engagement with other people to be successful, and so its addictive tools are built on our need to connect. Even if you set a realistic, attainable goal, there are lots of ways that social media can pull you back in.

Working in a group with a shared goal is a great way to ensure everyone's success. If you're working with a group of people, you can cheer for each other and keep each other motivated.

You can also find replacement projects together. For instance, you can gather five friends to get off TikTok and text videos to one another instead. Or you can work with your family to institute a household rule like no phones after dinner.



Once you've set your goal, some simple changes can help you work toward it without the interference of persuasive techniques:

- Turn off notifications on your phone.
- Change settings on specific apps:
  - Turn off autoplay on YouTube.
  - Turn off notifications on Instagram.
  - Turn off read receipts on WhatsApp.
- Use Apple's Screen Time or Android's Digital Well-Being tools to be more mindful of how you're spending time on your devices.

There are lots of tools to help you on your journey to healthier technology use. For more ideas and tips, check out the Center for Humane Technology's [Take Control](#) page.

Another way to help you take control of your social media use is to keep a journal of how it's going.

## KEEP A JOURNAL:

1. Keep track of your new usage. Every day, write down how you're doing with your goal.
  2. If you have new insights, write them down.
  3. If you're struggling to meet your goal, ask a friend or adult for help. Together, discuss why you might be struggling. For instance, why did you keep reaching for your phone? Why did you open that app? You may find a new strategy to help you meet your goal.
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## PART

## What's next?

# 4

Once you've worked toward your goal for a while, take a step back to learn from your experience.

## REFLECT:

*(If you're working in a group, it may be helpful to answer these questions together):*

1. What did you learn?



2. What will you change permanently?



3. What do you want others to know?



Taking control of your own habits is just the start of pushing for technology that respects our attention and our intentions. As long as hijacking our attention is profitable, companies will continue to find more powerful ways to do it.

Your personal experiences and the lessons you've learned are an important part of the movement for technology that serves the public good. If shifting your tech use has inspired you to take further action, you can:

- Consider sharing your reflection on **MySocialTruth** ([socialtruth.humanetech.com](https://socialtruth.humanetech.com)).
- Use the **Imagine Humane Technology** guide to explore the possibilities for humane technology and envision solutions that advance systemic change.