

HOW TO AVOID



A SOCIAL MEDIA MESS

SOCIAL MEDIA CAN GET A
LITTLE STICKY, BUT YOU CAN KEEP
YOURSELF SAFE AND CLEAN.



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Imagine squeezing all the toothpaste out of the tube. (If you have younger siblings or were a curious toddler yourself, maybe you don't have to imagine.) You might gently roll up the tube, or maybe grab and squeeze with abandon. But once the toothpaste is out, it's extremely difficult (maybe impossible) to get it back in.

That sticky toothpaste mess is like the information you share from your technological devices. Once you send it, post it, or share it, your words or pictures are out there, and there's no way to get them back.

That's why it's so important to be wise and thoughtful about everything you put out there. Sexting, cyberbullying, or thoughtlessly oversharing can have monstrous consequences on our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. But that doesn't mean all technology is bad or that we need to fear it. Squeezing toothpaste all over the bathroom is a bad idea. But that doesn't mean you should throw out all toothpaste and swear off brushing your teeth forever.

With toothpaste and technology, it's all about how you use it.

Here are some things you can do to avoid dangers and use social media wisely.

REMEMBER YOUR ACTUAL LIFE IS OUTSIDE OF YOUR PHONE.

Limit the time you spend staring at a screen. You have a great life in an amazing world—outside of your phone. With too much messaging, gaming, and social media, you're in danger of missing it! Focus on more shared experiences than shared posts. Aim for talking instead of texting.

Studies show that social media and texting can be addictive, even more so than drinking and smoking!! Crazy, right? You might not have a full-blown social media addiction, but social media might have a stronger hold on you than you realized if you:

- Pull out your phone every time your hands aren't doing something else.

- Get in a bad mood when you don't see any new notifications or messages.
- Use social media to forget your personal problems.
- Use social media so much that it negatively affects your school work, relationships, or job.
- Get restless or agitated when you can't use social media or your phone.

Maybe it's time to focus on making connections in the world outside of your phone.

SEEK CONNECTION, NOT ATTENTION.

We all crave acceptance and belonging. That's normal, and we can fill those needs with genuine interaction. But many of us make the mistake of thinking that getting as much attention as we can will fill those needs. Whenever you're thinking about posting or sharing something, ask yourself if you are seeking to connect and uplift or to get attention and validation. Sure, sharing boastful, shocking, or sexual content can get you a lot of attention and make you feel important or wanted.

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THE USE OF NEW MEDIA ARE CHOICES THAT

EXPAND YOUR MIND, INCREASE YOUR OPPORTUNITIES,

AND FEED YOUR SOUL.”

But this kind of attention is shallow at best. In fact, constantly seeking attention and validation from others will weaken your sense of identity and confidence. True and lasting confidence comes only by deepening your understanding of your relationship with God.

KEEP YOUR FUTURE SELF AND FUTURE EMPLOYERS IN MIND.

Remember the toothpaste? Once you post or send something, it's out there. You no longer have control over who else might see or share it. Everything you post is permanent (even if you delete it). It can be copied and is searchable. Remember, there's always a chance that future employers, family, friends, enemies, and strangers will see it. That might not matter to you now, but what about 5 or 10 years from now? Would a future employer get a good impression of you from your social media pages? Would you want your future spouse or children to see your posts or messages?

CHECK YOUR MOOD.

Don't post when you're in a bad mood. It can be tough to think clearly or make good decisions when you're sad, angry, or upset. As James so wisely taught us, our tongues (and thumbs, today) can be incredibly hard to tame (see James 3:8),

especially when we're feeling a strong emotion. We've all said (or typed) things we wouldn't normally say or posted something we regretted later. So before you reply, post, or comment—check your mood.

BE KIND TO EVERYONE . . .

The Savior's commandment to do good to everyone—including those who aren't kind to you (see Matthew 5:44)—counts online, too. Always be respectful, even (and maybe especially) when you're talking about something controversial.

“On the subject of public discourse, we should all follow the gospel teachings to love our neighbor and avoid contention,” said President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency. “Followers of Christ should be examples of civility. . . . Though we may disagree, we should not be disagreeable. Our stands and communications on controversial topics should not be contentious.”² To follow Christ means to follow His example both offline and online.

BUT TRUST VERY FEW.

You can be kind to everyone without trusting everyone. Not everything online is true, and not everyone is who they say they are. Avoid talking to people you don't know, and never send your pictures

or information to someone you don't know. To stay safe, you can also:

- Check your privacy settings and make sure you're not posting personal information publicly.
- Disable location services on social media apps.
- Only accept friend or follow requests from people you know.

IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU USE IT.

As technology progresses, it's like a giant door keeps opening wider and wider, allowing us to share and receive more and more—both good and bad. But as President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught, technology can also help us be “a powerful force for good in the Church and in the world. . . . Make sure that the choices you make in the use of new media are choices that expand your mind, increase your opportunities, and feed your soul.”³

It's all in how you use it. **NE**

NOTES

1. See W. Hofmann, KD Vohs, and Roy F. Baumeister, “What people desire, feel conflicted about, and try to resist in everyday life,” in *Self-Regulation and Self-Control: Selected Works of Roy F. Baumeister* (2018), 256–266, doi.org/10.4324/9781315175775.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, Oct. 2014 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 27).
3. M. Russell Ballard, “Sharing the Gospel Using the Internet,” *Ensign*, July 2008, 58, 60.