

Help is Here if You Are Experiencing the 'Fear of Missing Out'

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Help is Here if You Are Experiencing the 'Fear of Missing Out'

By Nathan Vink

UCF Forum columnist

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Technology is an amazing thing.

The quickness that the cell phone went from a brick with an antenna to an all-in-one sophisticated computer, camera and recording device is astounding. If you are in your 30s or older, you know a time when there were no cell phones and there was no such thing as the internet.

Now there is a strong desire to stay connected for the instant gratification of being the first to know, maybe about a news story or about a friend's update. One recent study showed that 84 percent of cell phone users say they could not go a day without access to their phone. Another study showed that more than 50 percent of cell phone users check their phones for messages and updates even when there isn't a notification buzz.

The act of a cell phone user pulling out a phone and checking the screen is being referred to as the new yawn, as the act is contagious to others.

With the speed that technology has developed, we are just now beginning to understand the physical and mental ramifications. Scientists have defined a psychological disorder referred to as the Fear of Missing Out. The addiction to checking social media can control lives and ruin relationships.

Facebook has been found to heighten feelings of envy, jealousy and loneliness. The act of constantly checking technology can leave a person feeling consistently exhausted and fatigued. These symptoms are very apparent on a college campus, as students multitask through their day between class, work and home life.

So what is the best medicine for this addiction? Disconnect and step away.

In outdoor education, creating planned time away from distractions is referred to as a solo experience. A solo is when students are given time and space away from the rest of a lengthy expedition to recover and reflect. It is not set up as a survival test, as the student is given a small space to stay within and given sufficient food and water to stay healthy.

This time, which can range from six hours to three days, is typically preceded by a difficult stretch of the expedition, which could include backpacking long miles for multiple days in a row, early 'alpine starts' in order to ascend a mountain peak, or orienteering navigation through difficult and tricky terrain. In most cases the rest is welcomed.

But as stepping away from your phone for just a day can be difficult for some, this event can be a great challenge. I found on courses where students were carrying 50 lb. backpacks, logging double-digit miles each day, and dealing with challenging weather and interpersonal conflicts, that the solo was the most intimidating aspect of the course.

The thought of being left alone with only your thoughts was far too out of the ordinary for some, but this is an integral time on the course in which the mission is to provide students with a greater sense of self-efficacy and to find their place in the world.

It allows students to be present in the natural environment and find comfort in solitude. It provides the time to rest the mind and body, which coincides with studies that show the brain learns and develops better when it is given time away from distractions. It allows for the mind to be more open to the creativity rather than consumption. Lastly, it provides the time to look back on everything that was accomplished and learn from mistakes and feedback.

These reflect the same benefits that can be found from disconnecting from technology every now and again.

The time away does not have to be a grand event like a solo, it can be as simple as taking the time to go for a walk without your phone.

For college students, taking a break after a big study session and going for a walk, or planning a longer hike following the end of a semester can allow valuable information and experiences to sink in and to be reflected on.

Finding solitude can be difficult in an urban environment, but Central Florida is filled with wilderness parks to provide the outlet.

Taking small steps to disconnect can lead to larger ones. Instead of pulling out your phone during downtime, take a seat and connect to what's happening around you. There are also different apps that will allow users to turn off different social media websites on their computer and phone, giving them freedom to still use the internet without the pull to check Facebook or Instagram.

If you are looking for an event to jump-start your new resolve, the National Day of Unplugging is March 3-4, 2017. This sundown-to-sundown 24-hour event is meant to help participants reconnect with the world outside of their technology bubble. Whether it is connecting with your local community or spending quality time with family, doing so without the pressure of outside distractions can provide a necessary rest and reset from always being plugged in.

Technology is a fantastic resource for interaction and enjoyment, but make sure to take the time to power down your device in order to power up your mind.

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