

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUR MENTAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH AT THIS TIME



TIPS FROM TELL MAMA

We understand that ongoing traumatic events in Gaza and Israel are having significant impacts on many communities and on the conversations that occur on social media. We understand that the tone, language, and rhetoric on social media platforms can have short-, medium-and long-term impacts on mental and emotional health. For example, viewing content that belittles, dehumanises, and promotes harrowing pictures and videos and seeks to polarise communities and propagate racism and division, can create anxiety, and affect mood and your overall wellbeing. Navigating timelines, finding correct information, avoiding hate, and keeping up to date can also feel like an intimidating experience.

Our minds come with inbuilt ways to reduce threats and risks to us, so when we feel that a situation is intimidating, risky or unpleasant, our levels of anxiety and stress rise because of the 'fight or flight' response that is present within us and which is a defensive and protective mechanism. However, over-exposure to stressful social media posts can mean that stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol can have longer-term impacts on our levels of anxiety, mood, and outlook on the world. It is important to remember that exposure to longer periods of anxiety and stress can also have impacts on your productivity, feelings of safety, self-confidence and self-esteem and can also affect how you feel about yourself.

This is why ensuring your mental health is vitally important at this time particularly if you feel strongly about events in the Middle East or if you have family affected by the violent actions that have taken place.



We would therefore advise the following:

1. Take regular breaks from social media platforms.

These platforms are resourced to ensure that you spend as much time on them as possible and that you post as many comments as possible. This being the case, it is even more important to take time out from viewing and responding on social media platforms. If you choose to comment, we also advise that you consider your post and how it may draw you further into discussions and the wider impacts comments you make may have on your *personal, emotional, and professional life*. Making your voice heard is important, nor is self-censoring, we just ask that you always consider the above points. To avoid falling foul of any falsehoods and disinformation, we encourage you to familiarise yourself with our [tips on social media and digital literacy skills](#).

2. If you have negative or intrusive thoughts caused by what you have viewed, do the following:

Take 10 minutes out of your schedule, find a quiet and comfortable space, and close your eyes. Do nothing apart from sitting with yourself. Our minds have a habit of wandering and may focus on the crisis, or intrusive thoughts about what you have viewed or read may come into your mind. *That is okay, they are simply thoughts.*

REMEMBER: They are only thoughts and just because you think them, it does not mean that they are you. Think of them as 'leaves on a stream.' Notice them come, sit with them, and watch the thoughts fade away in intensity, just like leaves on a stream. If another thought comes, treat it in the same way and use this technique daily, so that you can notice thoughts, disengage or step back from them, and observe how they don't have a hold on you.

3. If you feel anxious by what you have seen on social media, you may choose to do the following:

Once again, find a quiet comfortable spot where you can sit alone. Close your eyes and use the following breathing exercises to help reduce any anxiety.

Take a deep breath in for about 4 seconds, holding the breath for a few seconds and then let out your breath in a controlled manner by pursing your lips and blowing through them for about 7 seconds.

The key here is to have a longer 'out-breath' than your 'in-breath.'

Then allow your breathing to return to normal and after about 10-15 seconds, repeat the same 'in-breath' and 'out-breath' cycle as described above. Then let your breath return to normal.

It is important to conduct this exercise for 5-6 minutes and you can use this breathing and relaxation exercise any time in the day. The more you do this, the more you can train your body to get maximal benefits from it.

4. Set boundaries with news consumption,

while it is important to stay informed about world events, it is equally vital to set boundaries on your news consumption. This is critical. Designate specific times during the day to catch up on the latest developments and then switch off. Avoid constantly checking news alerts or engaging in ongoing, distressing conversations. This will help prevent emotional overload.

5. Taking time to relax during stages of your day is key.

This is particularly important for those of you who spend more than an hour a day on social media. This is why '*muscle tension and relaxation*' exercises can assist in calming any anxiety and in stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system which put simply, acts as a brake on anxiety.

Do this for about 10 minutes and in a quiet and comfortable place, close your eyes and take a few moments to position yourself so that you are sitting comfortably.

Lay your feet flat on the floor as you sit on a chair and feel yourself 'grounded' and in contact with the earth. *You are safe and secure.*

Then squeeze and contract the muscles in your calves hold the contraction for 5-7 seconds and then release the tension. Whilst doing this, you may want to mentally rehearse the word, 'RELAX' as you release the tension in your muscles.

Then squeeze and contract your thigh muscles, hold the contraction for 5-7 seconds, and then release. Once again, visualising or picturing the word 'RELAX.'

Follow this by squeezing the muscles that make up your backside, hold the contraction for 5-7 seconds, and then release. Once again, visualise or picture the word 'RELAX.'

You can do this for various muscle groups throughout the body and start from your legs through to the base of your neck. **REMEMBER:** the more you practice this, the quicker you will be able to relax doing the 'muscle tension and relaxation' exercises.

Your mental health matters; make time for it rather than time lost through social media scrolling.