

The Digital Funhouse Mirror

Social Media in Recovery

Topic Learning · The Recovery Files

Self-check questions are printed without scoring. Your scores and what they mean are in the app.

The Digital Funhouse Mirror: Navigating Social Media in Recovery

This interactive module explores the complex relationship between social media use and recovery from substance use disorders. Through self-assessment, reflection questions, and action planning, you'll develop awareness of how digital engagement impacts your recovery journey.

Important: Social media can be both a valuable recovery tool and a potential challenge. This assessment helps you identify your patterns and develop healthier digital habits that support rather than undermine your recovery.

How to use this module: Work through each section at your own pace. Be honest in your responses - this is for your personal growth and awareness. Your responses are saved automatically and can be reviewed with your counselor or support system.

Introduction: The Digital Recovery Landscape

Understanding social media's impact on recovery

Self-Assessment

Evaluate your relationship with social media

Reflection: Understanding Your Digital Patterns

Explore your patterns and experiences

What emotions or needs typically drive you to check social media during your recovery journey?

How does your mood generally change before and after social media use?

What specific types of recovery content leave you feeling inspired versus inadequate?

What role does seeking validation play in your social media activity related to recovery?

Reflection: Triggers and Challenges

Explore your patterns and experiences

What unexpected triggers have you encountered on social media platforms?

How does comparing your recovery journey to others online affect your motivation and self-perception?

In what ways might you be curating or filtering your recovery experience for online presentation?

How do you respond emotionally when seeing content related to your substance of choice?

Reflection: Cross-Addiction Transfer

Explore your patterns and experiences

What similarities do you notice between your previous substance use patterns and your current social media habits?

How does the dopamine response to notifications or engagement compare to substance-related triggers?

Do you ever use social media to avoid uncomfortable emotions in recovery? If so, how?

How does time spent on social media impact your ability to be present in your actual life?

Reflection: Beneficial Engagement

Explore your patterns and experiences

What specific types of social media engagement have most positively supported your recovery?

How do online recovery connections differ from your in-person support network?

What boundaries have you found most helpful in maintaining a healthy relationship with social media?

How might you use social media more intentionally to support rather than substitute for recovery?

Reflection: Growth Opportunities

Explore your patterns and experiences

What specific digital boundaries would you like to establish or strengthen?

How could you bring more authenticity to your online recovery presence?

What healthy alternatives could meet the needs you currently fulfill through social media?

What daily practices could help you maintain mindful awareness of your digital engagement?

Understanding Digital Cross-Addiction

How social media can replicate addictive patterns

The concept of "cross-addiction transfer" helps explain why social media can sometimes replicate addictive patterns. Understanding these parallels can help identify when social media use is supporting recovery versus when it may be replicating addictive patterns in a new form.

Similar Neurological Pathways

Both substance use and social media engagement can trigger dopamine release, potentially activating the same reward circuits in the brain.

Intermittent Reinforcement

The unpredictable nature of likes, comments, and notifications creates a particularly powerful reward pattern similar to certain forms of gambling or substance use.

Escape from Discomfort

Just as substances can provide temporary relief from difficult emotions, social media can function as an escape from the challenging feelings that arise in recovery.

Identity Reinforcement

The carefully curated personas we create online can replace the identity previously built around substance use.

Time Displacement

Hours lost to scrolling can replace time previously lost to substance use without addressing the underlying need for meaningful engagement.

Comparing and Despairing

The perfected images of recovery seen online can trigger the same feelings of inadequacy that may have contributed to substance use.

The Digital Recovery Balance

Finding equilibrium in online engagement

Action Planning

Create your digital wellness strategy

Based on your assessment results, select 2-3 specific digital engagement skills to develop. For each skill, work through the following planning framework:

Digital Engagement Skill 1

1. Define the current challenge:

What specific digital pattern are you addressing?

2. Identify triggers and obstacles:

What situations, emotions, or circumstances lead to this pattern?

3. Set a clear, measurable goal:

What specific outcome are you working toward?

4. Action steps:

List specific, concrete steps you'll take...

5. Accountability measures:

How will you track progress and maintain accountability?

6. Timeline:

When will you implement each step?

7. Plan for potential setbacks:

How will you respond if you slip back into old patterns?

Sample Action Plan: Time Boundaries

Challenge: Losing track of time while scrolling, displacing recovery activities

Triggers: Emotional discomfort, boredom, anxiety, notifications, habit

Goal: Limit social media to 45 minutes daily in scheduled blocks

Actions: Remove apps from phone, use app blockers, establish morning routine, create reminder questions

Accountability: Weekly review with sponsor, include in recovery check-ins

Timeline: Immediate app removal, full implementation within 2 weeks

Setbacks: Practice self-compassion, treat as information, recommit without judgment

Additional digital engagement skills you'd like to develop:

List other areas for growth...

What support do you need to implement these changes?

Consider people, tools, resources, or environmental changes...

Integration & Commitment

What insights have you gained about your relationship with social media through this assessment?

Reflect on what you've discovered...

How will you maintain awareness of your digital patterns moving forward?

What practices will help you stay conscious of your digital engagement?

What is your commitment to yourself regarding social media and recovery?

Write a personal commitment statement...

Remember: Developing a healthy relationship with social media in recovery is a gradual process that unfolds over time through consistent practice and awareness. Like recovery itself, this journey isn't about achieving perfection but about progress—creating increasingly greater intentionality around digital engagement and ensuring that technology serves your recovery rather than undermining it.

Next Steps: Consider sharing your insights and action plan with your counselor, sponsor, or trusted person in recovery. Regular check-ins about your digital wellness can become part of your overall recovery maintenance.

Introduction: The Digital Recovery Landscape

The notification sound from a phone can trigger the same dopamine response as the clink of ice in a glass or the pop of a pill bottle. In recovery, many find that different stimuli activate the same neural pathways that once responded to substances. This phenomenon, called "cross-addiction transfer," explains how the brain can substitute one dopamine-triggering behavior for another while maintaining the same fundamental patterns.

Social media in recovery presents a complex landscape of both opportunities and challenges. While digital platforms can provide crucial support, connection, and resources, they can also trigger comparison, create unrealistic expectations, and potentially replicate addictive patterns in digital form.

Key Considerations

- Digital engagement can supplement but should never replace in-person recovery support
- Social media algorithms are designed to maximize engagement, not wellbeing
- The curated nature of online content can create distorted views of recovery
- Awareness of digital patterns is the first step toward healthier engagement
- Boundaries and intentionality are essential for beneficial social media use

Note: This module is not about eliminating social media entirely, but about developing a conscious, intentional relationship with digital platforms that supports your recovery journey.

Self-Assessment

This assessment explores both potentially problematic patterns of social media use and the development of healthy digital engagement skills. Rate each statement on a scale of 1-5:

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Part 1: Problematic Social Media Patterns

1. I feel a strong urge or compulsion to check social media notifications.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

2. I find myself comparing my recovery journey unfavorably to others I see online.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

3. I craft my recovery posts thinking about reactions they'll receive rather than my authentic experience.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

4. I spend more time engaged with online recovery communities than in-person support.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

5. I notice my mood worsens after certain types of social media engagement.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

6. I present a more perfect or curated version of my recovery online than my lived experience.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

7. I feel anxious or restless when unable to check social media for extended periods.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

8. I encounter unexpected triggers related to my addiction while using social media.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

9. I lose track of time while scrolling through recovery-related content.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

10. I feel personally affected when recovery influencers I follow announce relapses or struggles.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

Problematic Patterns Score: 0 / 50

Part 2: Healthy Digital Engagement Skills

11. I have clear boundaries around when and how long I use social media.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

12. I regularly evaluate how different platforms and accounts affect my recovery.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ **5**

13. I wait and process experiences privately before sharing them publicly.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ **5**

14. I prioritize in-person recovery activities before engaging with digital spaces.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ **5**

15. I can recognize when social media use is triggering addictive thought patterns.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ **5**

16. I maintain authenticity in my online recovery presence, including struggles and setbacks.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ **5**

17. I use social media as a supplement to, not replacement for, in-person connection.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

18. I'm selective about which recovery content I consume based on its impact on my wellbeing.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

19. I can disengage from unhelpful online interactions without significant emotional distress.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

20. I regularly audit and adjust my digital boundaries based on my current recovery needs.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

Healthy Engagement Score: 0 / 50

The Digital Recovery Balance

Social media in recovery involves finding balance between several key factors. Consider where you fall on each of these continuums:

Authenticity vs. Privacy

Sharing honestly while maintaining appropriate boundaries around your personal journey

Connection vs. Comparison

Using platforms to build genuine relationships while avoiding the trap of unhealthy comparisons

Support vs. Dependency

Benefiting from digital communities without becoming dependent on online validation

Inspiration vs. Unrealistic Expectations

Finding motivation without internalizing perfectionistic recovery narratives

Accessibility vs. Overexposure

Utilizing the convenience of digital resources while preventing constant triggering exposure

Expression vs. Performance

Sharing your journey as authentic expression rather than curated performance

Supplementation vs. Substitution

Using digital connection to enhance rather than replace in-person recovery support

Reflect on your personal balance points:

Where do you tend to fall on these continuums? Which areas need more attention?
