

10 LIFE HACKS FOR WANNA-BE-WELL-ADJUSTED 20 SOMETHINGS



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

LAUREN L. GRIFFETH, PH.D.
AMANDA STEPHENS, MPA



Are you 20-something and transitioning to **work-life** for the first time? Is adulting knocking at your door? It's time to **#getyourlifetogether** so that you can dominate this new life phase.

These **10 Life Hacks for Wanna-be-well-adjusted 20-somethings** will help you upgrade your work-life status.



#10

BE FRESH.
Try new things.
Meet new people.



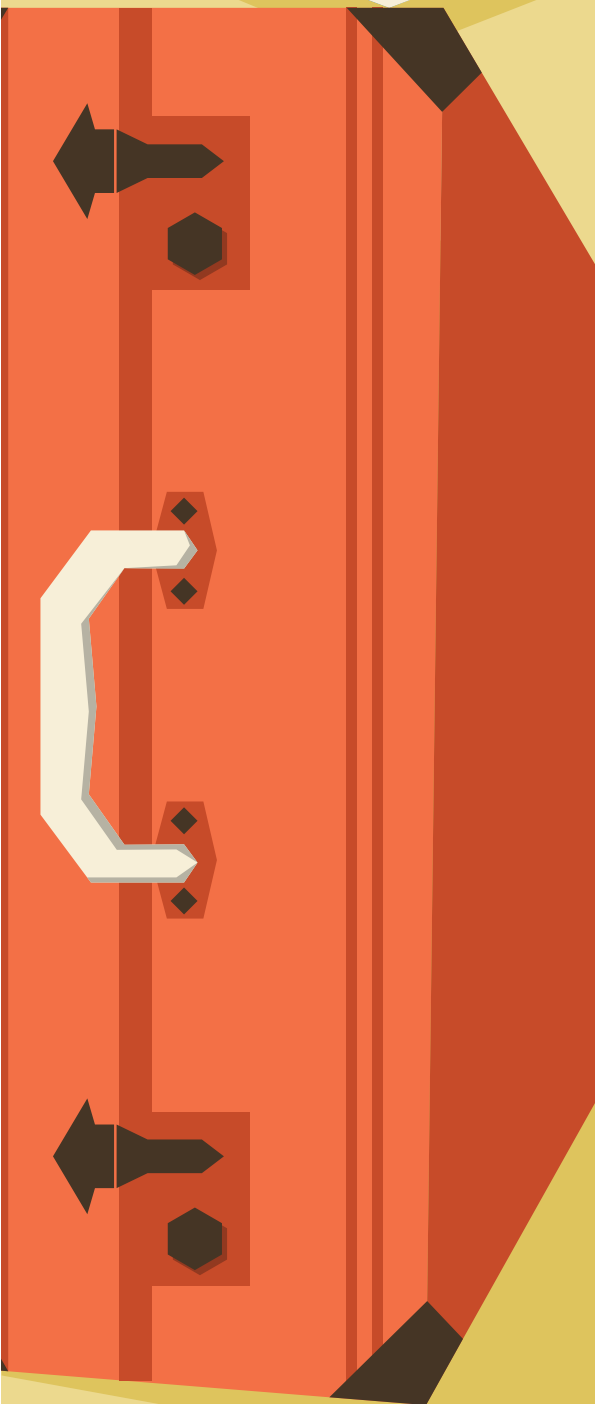
RESEARCH ON SOCIAL NETWORKS shows that the average person can count between 150 and 200 people as friends or casual acquaintances in today's society, but the inner circle is much, much smaller. Like personalities typically attract those like themselves, which is great for planning the attire for your company's group photo session, but not so great when you want to diversify your network and increase your exposure to new ideas.

Be intentional about making new relationships in places that are new to you. Attend a new event, volunteer or do something that you wouldn't normally do in your community in order to branch out. Find at least one or two people with whom you have never connected at those events and start new relationships. **Be intentional about expanding your circle.**

In her book "The Defining Decade," Meg Jay, author and clinical psychologist, writes about how new things come from "weaker ties." She says that, "as we look for jobs or relationships or opportunities of any kind, it is the people we know the least well who will be the most transformative. New things almost always come from outside your inner circle." Since your inner circle is probably made up of people who are a lot like you, it makes sense that new ideas and connections will come from outside of that circle. Whether you're hunting for a job, curious about a new career path or looking for new relationships, utilize your weaker ties and watch your network grow.



CREATE YOUR MANTRA.
Know your stressors.
Let the pressure go!





STRESS CAN BE BAD FOR YOUR BRAIN.

We all know it. Cortisol, the hormone that increases during stressful situations, is deployed to help your body work through a fight-or-flight response that can be triggered while you are exposed to stress. When people are in a constant state of stress, the brain can actually be reprogrammed to think that the stressed state is the new normal, according to Cara Wellman, neuroscience researcher from Indiana University Bloomington. In these instances, elevated cortisol continues to run through the body and can wreak havoc on your immune system, brain function and mood.

What can you do about it? Stop the pressure. Remove yourself from the stress. Take a walk, go to sleep or hit the gym. Thirty minutes of cardio will allow the cortisol to break up and resolve itself back into your system.

And, of course, find your mantra. Focusing on your personal mantra can take your brain to a healthier place where you are focused on the power of being you. A mantra is a very simple, short phrase that should be developed in the present tense. This phrase should be meaningful to you and should give your brain the ability to become uplifted (e.g., “I change my thoughts; I change my world.”). Also, remember that your source of stress may or may not go away, but you can change how you handle your stress.

Persevere through stress when you can, but remember that breaks from work are OK for your mind and body. Try to avoid sending emails from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. whenever possible. The blue light from your cell phone keeps your sensory system awake, so put the phone down to relax your mental muscles and let the pressure go.



#18

**PICK YOUR BOSS, THEN
PICK YOUR CLOTHES.**
Yes, in that order.

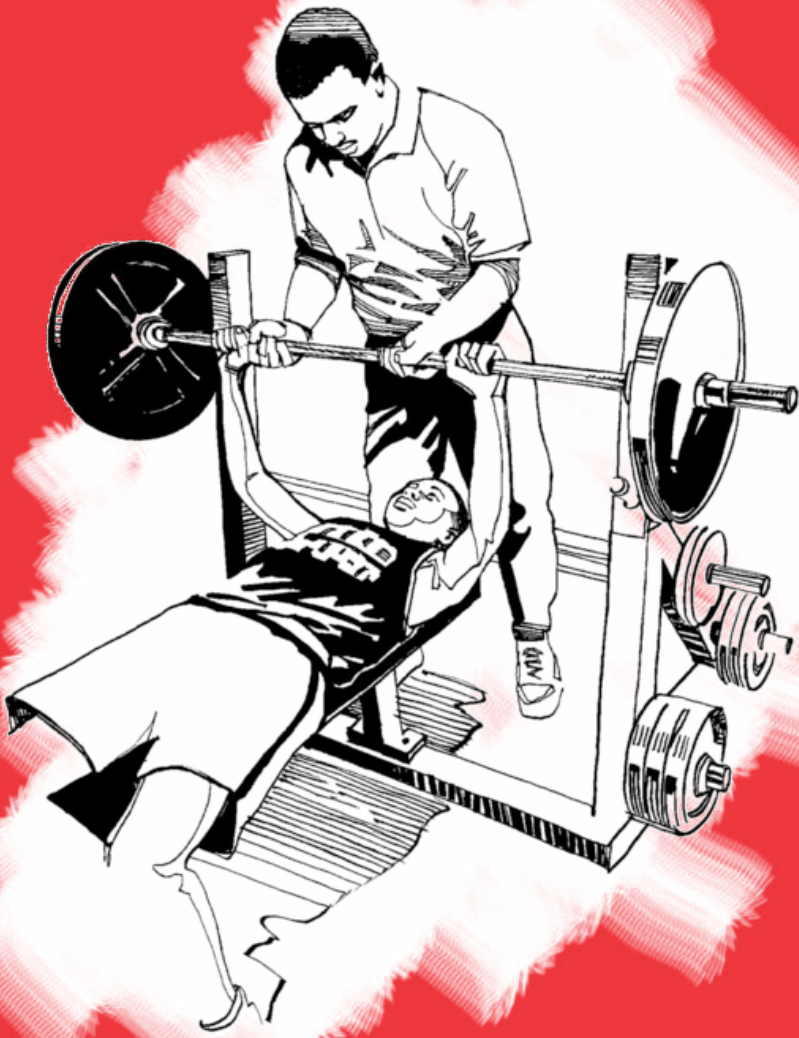


DOES YOUR WORKPLACE HAVE A DRESS CODE? Being mindful of what you wear to work can have a larger impact than you think. Look to your boss for cues about dress code. Does your boss wear pearls? Hose? What about a bow tie? Think about your outfit in your boss's mind frame before you bust out those 4-inch wedge heels and dress jeans for the company's big sales pitch.

Dressing up can give you a mental advantage. A recent study by Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management showed that people who wore outfits suited to their job type performed better during cognitive tests than those who did not. The term "enclothed cognition" refers to bodily sensations that affect how we think and feel. **While dressing up may not always be appropriate for your job, dressing appropriately for the situation (and in line with what your boss is wearing) will certainly give you the confidence to perform better at work.** So go ahead and slip on your jacket, tie or dress shoes and give your brain the feeling of being at your best.

It turns out that there is something to be said for "dressing for the job you want."





#7

**TO MAKE SOMEONE LIKE YOU,
ASK THEM FOR A FAVOR. (IT
WORKS! NO, REALLY IT DOES.)**
Need to make a friend? Ask
them for a favor, then follow
up with sincere thanks.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, ONE OF OUR NATION'S FOUNDING FATHERS, WRITES ABOUT AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE THAT HE HAD WHILE TRYING TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER LEGISLATOR.


He wrote, "Having heard that he had in his library a very certain scarce and curious book, I wrote a note to him expressing my desire of perusing that book and requesting he would do me the favour of lending it to me for a few days. He sent it immediately and I returned it in about a week with another note expressing strongly my sense of favour. When we next met in the House, he spoke to me (which he had never done before), and with great civility; and ever after he manifested a readiness to serve me on all occasions, so that we became great friends and our friendship continued to his death."

Who are the individuals that you interact with at work who can help you accomplish a task or reach a specific goal? Can you ask them for their help, then respond with genuine thankfulness? Try it. You may build great relationships in the process.





**DISCOVER YOUR
NEW NORMAL
AND LIKE IT.**

An illustration of a person's legs from the waist down. They are wearing a red dress with a yellow hem and red sneakers with white soles and laces. The background is a yellow and white diagonal striped pattern.

BEFORE YOU STARTED YOUR JOB, THURSDAY EVENINGS MAY HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED FOR SOCIALIZING WITH FRIENDS.

Yes, Thursday, as in the weeknight when everyone in your college town organized their social functions. Surely these exciting adventures will continue into your working life, right? Think again. When you have to be “on” at 8 a.m. every day, late-night escapades involve letting your dog out to go to the bathroom. **Going to bed early might feel foreign at first, but it will help you adjust from being a night owl to being a daytime, workplace, singing sparrow.** Trust us, you won’t regret that feeling of being well-rested at work.

Find a hobby that you enjoy that fits into your workday or weekend schedule, even if it is something you do once a month. Get involved in service projects for your community, create a book club or join a local house of worship. Count your blessings. Look at the bright side whenever you can. You will be amazed at the transitions from college students to young professionals and families that are happening to the friend group around you. When you feel like you are a part of your community by making friends with other young professionals and providing a service to others, you will begin to thrive.

The background is a vibrant, abstract illustration of a park scene. It features large trees with foliage in shades of green, purple, and pink. In the foreground, two people are depicted in a relaxed setting. One person, with red hair and wearing a blue swimsuit, is lying on a purple blanket on the grass. The other person, wearing a red bikini, is sitting on a white lounge chair. The overall style is expressive and colorful, with visible brushstrokes and a mix of warm and cool tones.

45

**MAP THE SEASONS
OF YOUR PEOPLE.**
Are they friends for
life or just friends
in your life?



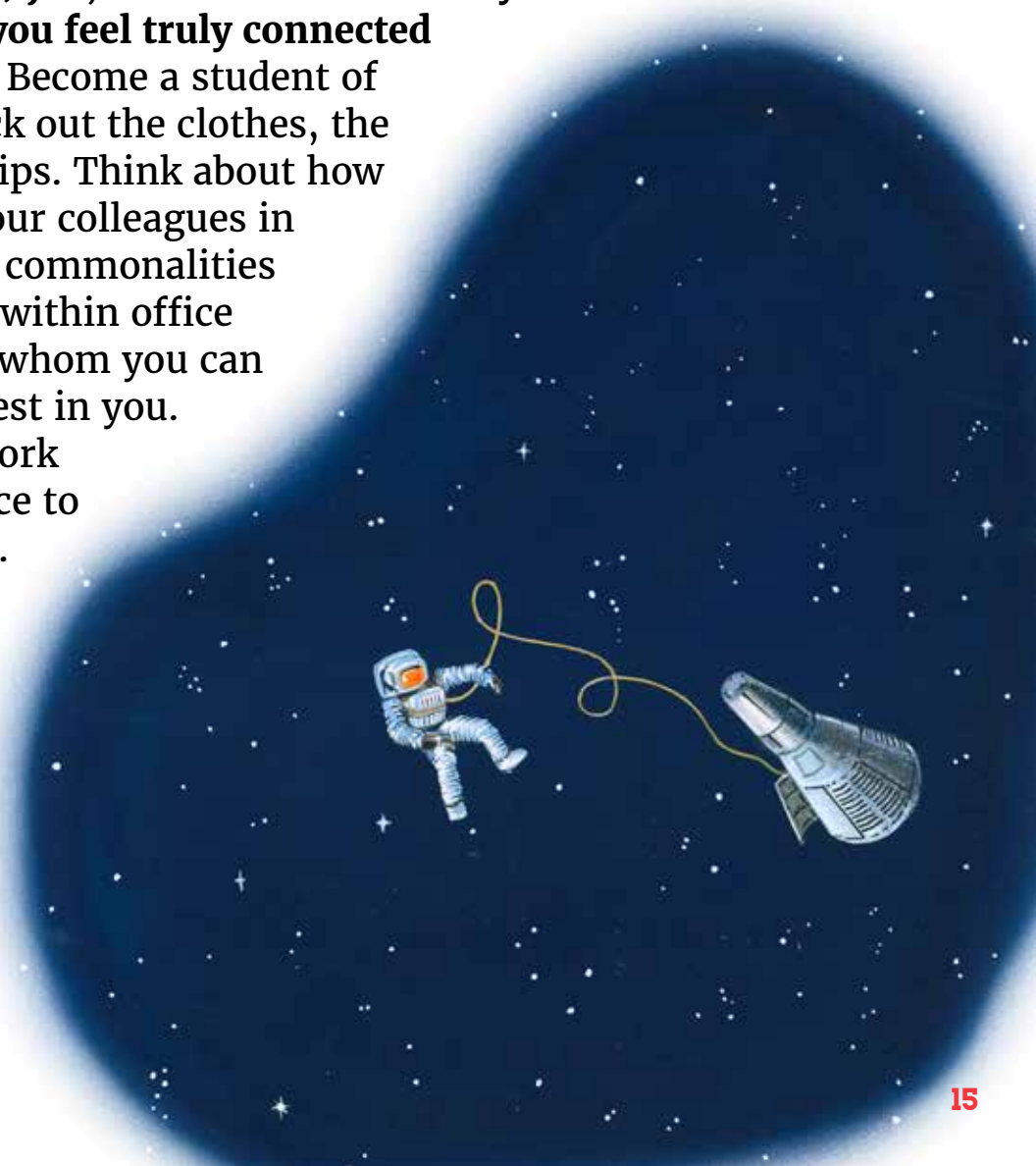
WHO ARE YOUR REAL FRIENDS? This is not your Facebook network or your Snapchat, Instagram or Twitter followers. These are the people who are part of your life, and who you trust to be a part of your life. Instead of rolling through friends on your newsfeed, it could be time to sit down and think about the people in your life who are lifetime friends. Your college days are a special time during which you build relationships with lots of great people. As those people begin “adulting” on their own life path, so will you. Try to stay in touch, but remember that some people will only enter your life for a short time. It is OK to appreciate them for the time you spent together during college. Make a map of your closest relationships, then brainstorm ways to spend time investing in these people. **How can you prioritize the people who mean the most to you?** Can you plan sit-down conversations with them or time to catch up? Think about those who are constantly draining your life bucket. Is it time to let a few relationships go? When you have children, your friendship circle may shrink to include only the parents of your kids’ friends. So, being intentional about keeping in touch is needed to maintain important friendships.



**INVESTIGATE
YOUR WORK
CULTURE.
Listen, learn
and link in.**

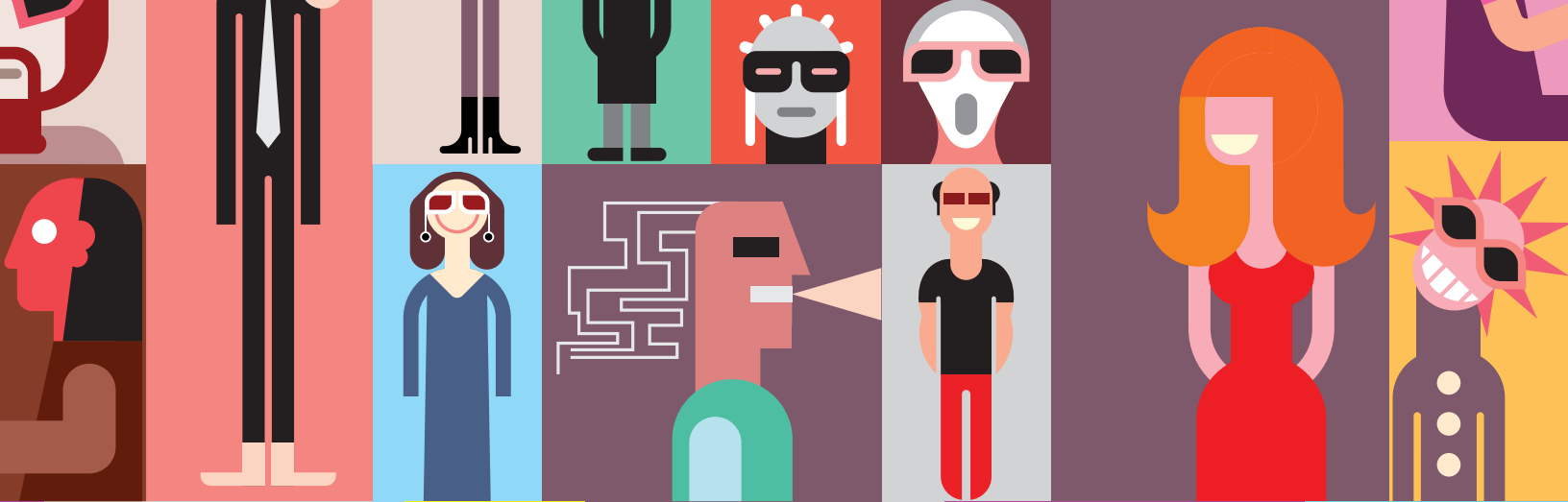
A RECENT SURVEY BY THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION SHOWS THAT NEARLY 70 PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES ARE DISENGAGED IN THEIR WORKPLACE. Nearly 58 percent of employees look around for other jobs at least once a month, while one in five employees planned to leave their employer in 2016. With all of the people who are unhappy in their jobs, it is no wonder that millennials are having trouble sticking with their first job for more than one year. Instead of being on the out, think about how you can plug in.

You may feel discouraged or dissatisfied in your first (or second or third) job, but realize that it may take some time before you feel truly connected in your new workplace. Become a student of your environment. Check out the clothes, the dialogue, the relationships. Think about how you can connect with your colleagues in a meaningful way. Find commonalities and try to pursue those within office talk. Find the people in whom you can invest and who will invest in you. As you are starting at work you only have one chance to make a first impression. Give it your best shot so that you won't regret it later.





YOU DO YOU.
Find a way to be
yourself in a world
that is constantly
influencing your
thoughts, behavior
and speech.



THE WORKING WORLD CAN BE FULL OF INTENSE PRESSURE TO ASSIMILATE INTO THE COOKIE-CUTTER MOLD OF THE HIGH-PERFORMING STAR EMPLOYEE THAT PERSONIFIES THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE.


Most of that pressure is often self-inflicted. Since the beginning of social interactions, individuals seeking to blend into the crowd have mimicked behavior to avoid standing out and getting picked on by predators. In modern society, mimicking behavior allows us to operate like those around us and to form in-groups and out-groups. This happens as early as 3 years of age in a classroom environment. As adult chameleons, we might love the latest fashion trends, catchy phrases or even practice social cues without having any idea of how we have been subliminally influenced by our personal in-group or world exposure.

At work, mimicking behavior kicks in when employees literally follow the leader or other high-performers in dress, speech, hobbies and even mannerisms. Looking sharp can help you feel sharp, but those feelings will fade if you aren't really "feeling it," so to speak. If you can find a way to be you in a world that is constantly influencing your thoughts, behavior and speech without you realizing it, then you have won a major battle waged from within. **Tasteful authenticity means being the truest version of you while still respecting the culture and environment of which you are a part.** Practicing authenticity is both empowering for you and refreshing for others. The late, great Judy Garland said, "Always be a first-rate version of yourself instead of a second-rate version of somebody else."



#42

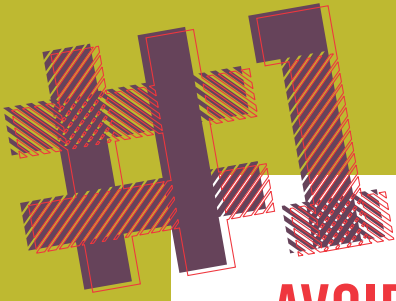
CHOOSE YOUR SPOUSE
AND, THEREFORE,
CHOOSE YOUR FAMILY.



IT CAN BE SAID THAT CHOOSING YOUR PARTNER IS AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS YOU WILL EVER MAKE IN YOUR LIFE. Relational psychologists tell us that opposites tend to attract, but “birds of a feather stay together.” When you begin dating someone, the differences in that person’s personality or life situation may be intriguing at first, but for long-term relationship happiness, you must decide if you feel that those differences are something that you can embrace and enjoy in the long run. Your personalities are one ingredient. Then, there is the family dynamic.

Let’s go ahead and bust this myth. You DO marry the family. It’s true. Chances are you will not only be spending every holiday, birthday, graduation and celebration with your in-laws, but they will be keeping your kids when they are sick, helping you with your dog when you go out of town or maybe even expecting you to come over for dinner every Sunday. If you are the kind of person who dodges meeting the family until you are more serious, we are suggesting that you go ahead and bite the bullet. What if you are very serious about someone but do not get along with that person’s family? Yikes! You could be making a huge mistake by jumping in too quickly.

When you settle on your life partner and their family, you have the unique opportunity to choose a family that makes you feel loved and that you can love in return. Look for the total package in finding your spouse, and a family, that works together. You will be glad you did.

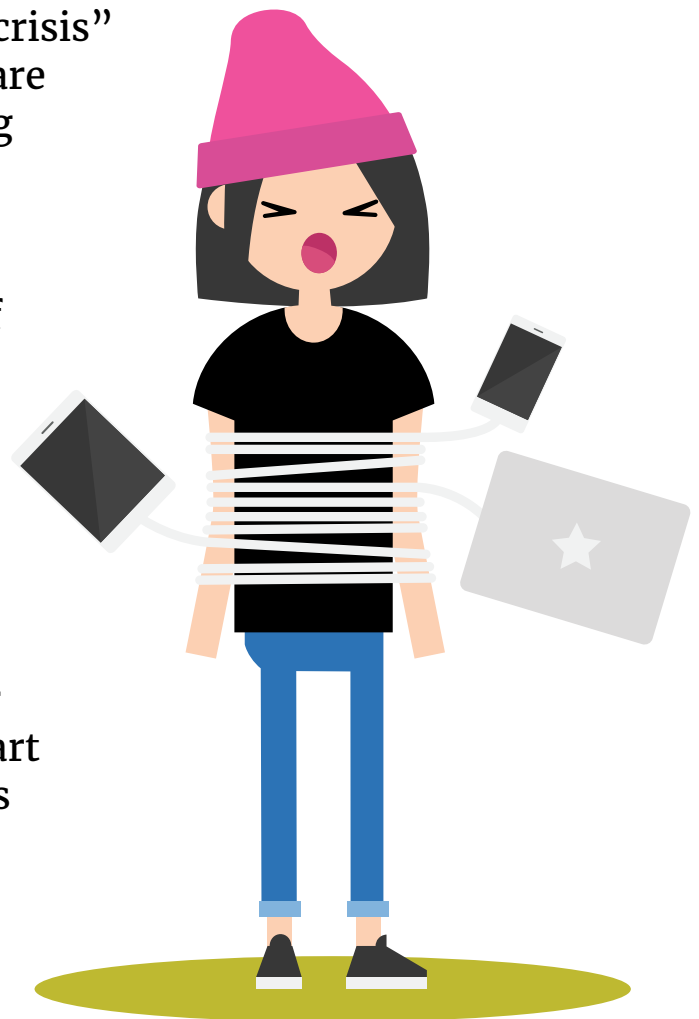


**AVOID A VIRTUAL
QUARTER-LIFE
CRISIS BY LIMITING
YOUR VIRTUAL LIFE.**



ACCORDING TO DATA FROM THE GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY, THE NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO SAY THEY HAVE NO CLOSE FRIENDS HAS ROUGHLY TRIPLED IN RECENT DECADES. “Zero” is also the most common response when people are asked how many confidants they have, and adult men are particularly bad at cultivating and keeping friendships. It seems that we are in a world of busy, where stopping to build relationships might make us miss a deadline. The millennial generation is also struggling with mental health issues and has more documented cases than any other generation. Depression and anxiety cases are on the rise, and the term “quarter-life crisis” is gaining notoriety as 20-somethings are navigating a difficult job market, paying off debt from their college degrees and dealing with real-world problems.

Virtual identities can also be a source of mental strain. In 2014, Americans spent an average of six hours online and 1.7 hours on some form of social media each day, according to GlobalWebIndex. Eighty percent of millennials sleep beside their smart phones, and 53 percent reported that they would rather lose their sense of smell than forever part with technology. Cell phone distractions cause one out of four driving accidents.



Researchers say that social media can actually increase stress when we: (1) compare our lives to the seemingly perfect lives of others based on shared photos, (2) become aware of other people's stress and take it on ourselves or (3) feel guilty for spending too much time on social media when we should be doing something productive.

Virtual interactions are no replacement for physical ones. Laughing, hugging and sharing personal stories sends positive endorphins through your body, lowering your risk of depression and heart-related illness. While social media can be a seemingly fun outlet to use to stay connected with your circle, it can never replace face-to-face relationships and their positive effects in your life.

If you find yourself comparing your life to others via social media, remember that you're never seeing the full story. Take a step back from your virtual life and take a step into real relationships. Ask a new acquaintance to join you for coffee, take a weekend trip with your closest friend, host a dinner party at your house or organize a game night and you'll see real community develop in this new season of your life.



REFERENCES

Bar, M., Neta, M., & Linz, H. (2006). Very first impressions. *Emotion*, 6(2), 269-278. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.6.2.269>
Grant, A. (2014).

Give and take. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/give-and-take/201407/do-you-know-who-your-real-friends-are>
Heid, M. (2015).

You asked: How many friends do I need? *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/3748090/friends-social-health/>

Indiana University Bloomington. (2017). Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. Retrieved from <http://psych.indiana.edu/faculty/wellmanc.php>

Jay, M. (2013). The defining decade: Why your twenties matter and how to make the most of them now. New York: Grand Central Publishing.

McGregor, J. (2012). New study: What you wear could affect how well you work. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-leadership/post/new-study-what-you-wear-could-affect-how-well-you-work/2011/04/01/gIQAssHomR_blog.html

van Schaik, J., & Hunnius, S. (2016). Little chameleons: The development of social mimicry during early childhood. *Journal Of Experimental Child Psychology*, 14771-81. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2016.03.003.

Watkins, D., Hunt, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2011). Increased demand for mental health services on college campuses: Perspectives from administrators. *Qualitative Social Work*. 0(00), 1-19. doi: 10.1177/1473325011401468.

extension.uga.edu

Circular 1115

Reviewed August 2022

Published by the University of Georgia in cooperation with Fort Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and counties of the state. For more information, contact your local UGA Cooperative Extension office. *The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (working cooperatively with Fort Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the counties of Georgia) offers its educational programs, assistance, and materials to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation or protected veteran status and is an Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action organization.*