



**A GUIDE TO
PLAYSAFE**

THE NEW PLAYGROUND



Co-funded by
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ASOCIACIÓN
MIRAS



The New Playground: A Guide to Play Safe, 2025

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Figure 1: DigComp, the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens. European Commission, 2022.

Figure 2: Indicators Related to Risk Behaviors in Young People

Figure 3: Indicators Related to Risk Behaviors Arising from Problems with Social Media

This guide was jointly developed by the partner organizations Asociación Albores (Spain), Asociación MIRAS (Spain), and ETPM (Portugal), within the framework of the Erasmus+ project Disconnected Realities (Project Reference: 2023-3-PT02-KA210-YOU-000179100), coordinated by ETPM (Portugal). The project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

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**What is
your role
in Social Media?**

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01

INTRODUCTION

The manual *The New Playground: A Guide to Play Safe* was created within the framework of the European ERASMUS+ project “(Dis)Connected Realities.”

The main objectives of the manual are to inform, raise awareness, and sensitize professionals about the use of social media and its impact on young people’s emotional well-being. This guide also aims to provide practical tools for the critical and healthy use of social media, as well as for preventing risks associated with technology misuse, emphasizing that technology itself is not negative—but awareness about how it is used is essential.

Through a joint effort by the Spanish organizations ALBORES and MIRAS, and the Portuguese institution Escola Técnica Profissional da Moita, this manual seeks to offer guidance to youth workers in this area. The open-access manual *The New Playground: A Guide to Play Safe* was developed by a multidisciplinary team including youth workers, teachers, psychologists, sociologists from the three coordinating organizations, as well as other European partner entities. Its creation was driven by the needs of youth professionals, who often lack strategies and tools to work with young people on conscious social media use.

According to the Digital 2021: Europe report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, Europe has a high rate of social media penetration, with 42% of the total population using these platforms. Young people typically spend between 7 and 8 hours online each day (DataReportal, 2023), which raises important concerns. The COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionately negative impact on young people, increasing feelings of discouragement, depression, loneliness, and stress—at much higher levels than in older age groups (Eurofound, May 2020). This shows that social media is an integral part of many young Europeans’ lives, and underlines the need for strategies that promote responsible and safe use—transforming platforms into tools rather than lifestyles.



It is essential for organizations to have access to tools that promote awareness of the impact of social media and offer safe, supportive spaces for working with youth—especially the most vulnerable—on prevention and intervention. Having specific resources, tools, and strategies in the digital sphere can enable a more positive and resilient use of social networks and new technologies.

The manual is structured around seven main themes:

- Digital Literacy and Well-being
- Risks Associated with Social Media Use
- Identifying Risky Behaviors in Young People
- What’s Good About Social Media?
- Tools and Resources for Professionals
- Final Recommendations
- Activities for Awareness and Reflection on Social Media Use

We invite you to dive into this manual—and show your support to *The New Playground: A Guide to Play Safe*.

02

GLOSSARY

A

AI Filter: A filter or effect generated by artificial intelligence that alters or enhances a person's appearance in photos or videos.

Avatar: A digital representation or character used to interact in virtual environments or games, often customizable by the user.

B

Baiting: Provoking someone online to make them respond emotionally or aggressively, often for entertainment or manipulation.

Body Positivity: A movement that promotes acceptance and appreciation of all body types, countering unrealistic beauty standards often amplified by social media.

C

Catfishing: Pretending to be someone else online, often using fake photos and information, to deceive or manipulate others.

Clickbait: Content with sensationalist headlines designed to attract clicks, often leading to misleading or low-quality articles.

Cyberstalking: Persistent, threatening, or harassing behavior carried out through digital means, often involving surveillance, messages, or public shaming.

D

Digital Burnout: A state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged and intense use of technology, often affecting productivity and well-being.

Digital Citizenship: The set of rights, responsibilities, and skills needed to participate ethically and effectively in the digital world.

Digital Detox: A period during which a person voluntarily refrains from using digital devices and platforms to reduce stress and regain balance.

Digital Exposure: When someone shares private information or content online, either voluntarily or through coercion, losing control over who accesses it.

Digital Fatigue: A sense of mental exhaustion caused by excessive screen time or constant connectivity.

Digital Footprint Management: Strategies to control and clean up one's online presence, including deleting old posts or changing privacy settings.

Digital Hoarding: The compulsive saving of digital files, messages, or screenshots, often without organization or purpose.

Digital Immigrant: A person who was not born into the digital era but has had to adapt to technology later in life.

Digital Literacy: The ability to critically understand, evaluate, and use digital technologies in a safe and responsible way.

Digital Minimalism: A lifestyle choice that encourages intentional, limited use of technology to focus on what truly matters.

Digital Native: A person born and raised in the digital era, who is naturally familiar with technology from a young age.

Digital Well-being: A state of physical, mental, and emotional health related to how one uses digital technologies and manages screen time.

Doxxing: Publishing someone's private information (address, phone, workplace) on the internet without their consent, usually to harass them.

E

Echo Chamber: A digital environment where one only sees content that confirms their beliefs, making it harder to hear opposing viewpoints.

F

Fake News: Deliberately false or manipulated information shared as if it were true, to influence opinions or generate clicks.

Filter Bubble: A result of personalized algorithms that limit the diversity of information we see online, reinforcing our biases.

FOJI (Fear of Joining In): The fear of joining online conversations or activities due to anxiety about being judged, rejected, or ridiculed.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): Anxiety caused by the belief that others are having rewarding experiences without you, often triggered by social media.

G

Grooming: The strategy used by adults to gain minors' trust online and sexually exploit or manipulate them emotionally.

H

Hate Speech: Content that promotes discrimination, hostility, or violence against a person or group based on race, gender, religion, etc.

I

Influencer: A person with significant online visibility who can shape the opinions and behaviors of others through content and sponsored posts.

L

Lurking: The act of consuming online content without interacting or participating in the conversation (e.g., not liking or commenting).

M

Microinfluencer: A social media user with a smaller but highly engaged audience who influences niche communities or specific interest groups.

O

Online Disinhibition Effect: A phenomenon where people behave more openly, aggressively, or emotionally online due to anonymity and lack of face-to-face interaction.

Oversharing: Excessively publishing personal information online, which can compromise privacy and emotional safety.

P

Phishing: A cyberattack that mimics trusted entities (banks, companies, institutions) to trick users into sharing passwords or private data.

R

Revenge Porn: The non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos, usually by an ex-partner, to harm or embarrass the victim.

S

Scam: A fraudulent scheme designed to deceive users and steal money or personal data, often spread through social media or messaging apps.

Second Screen: The simultaneous use of another device (like a phone or tablet) while watching TV or using a computer, often leading to divided attention.

Selfie Dysmorphia: A distortion of body image caused by comparing one's real appearance to filtered or heavily edited selfies.

Sexting: The act of sending or receiving sexually explicit messages, images, or videos through digital devices. It can become risky if content is shared without consent.

Sharenting: When parents share images or personal information about their children on social media without the child's consent.

Social Engineering: Psychological manipulation used to trick individuals into revealing confidential information, often through digital means.

T

TMI (Too Much Information): Oversharing personal, emotional, or intimate details on social media or digital platforms.

Trigger Warning: A notice given to alert users that content may be emotionally disturbing or triggering, especially regarding trauma, violence, or mental health.

U

Unboxing: A type of video content where users film themselves opening and reviewing a new product, popular on platforms like YouTube or TikTok.

W

Whaling: A targeted *phishing* attack directed at high-profile individuals, such as executives or public figures, using personalized and sophisticated strategies.

03

**DIGITAL LITERACY AND
WELL-BEING**

Technological progress and globalization have a significant impact on how young people behave and interact with one another. They also play a critical role in shaping the way young people think and learn. The current generation is perhaps the first in which young people are true digital natives. Learning to navigate this massive and uninterrupted stream of information is, therefore, a process comparable to learning how to read and write: it is a form of literacy.

The people responsible for guiding this process are often educational figures who were not born into the world of social media. This generational gap makes it harder to understand the inherent risks associated with these

platforms. Even the very concept of what is real or unreal (because it is not tangible) can vary significantly, as does the way time is managed online and offline—where the latter can seem almost abstract to today's youth. For this reason, learning must move in two directions: from youth workers to young people, and from young people to youth workers.

This is where Artificial Intelligence enters the scene—



another game changer. It is also a reminder that learning must be continuous in order to guide young people as they navigate the turbulent waters of social media toward digital well-being. Observe, listen, learn, adapt, and update—so we can teach.

Competencies for Digital Well-being

The way we communicate and relate to others is in constant flux, and technology is a driving force behind these transformations. Like any human activity, adapting to these changes comes with multiple challenges. One of the greatest challenges posed by unrestricted and autonomous access to information is the ability to verify and analyze the content we consume.

In today's fast-paced world, anything posted online is often taken as truth without any form of verification or critical evaluation. To face this challenge, we must raise young people's awareness about the risks of sharing unverified content and promote curiosity, research, inquiry, and critical

thinking. Interestingly, the very contradiction embedded in open access to social media can actually contribute to building these skills—because, as mentioned earlier, change brings not only challenges, but also progress and, often, solutions.

We do not consider social media to be inherently negative. However, we recognize the need to offer guidance and support to ensure its use is conscious and safe. When used inappropriately, social media can hinder social integration and adaptability across different contexts.

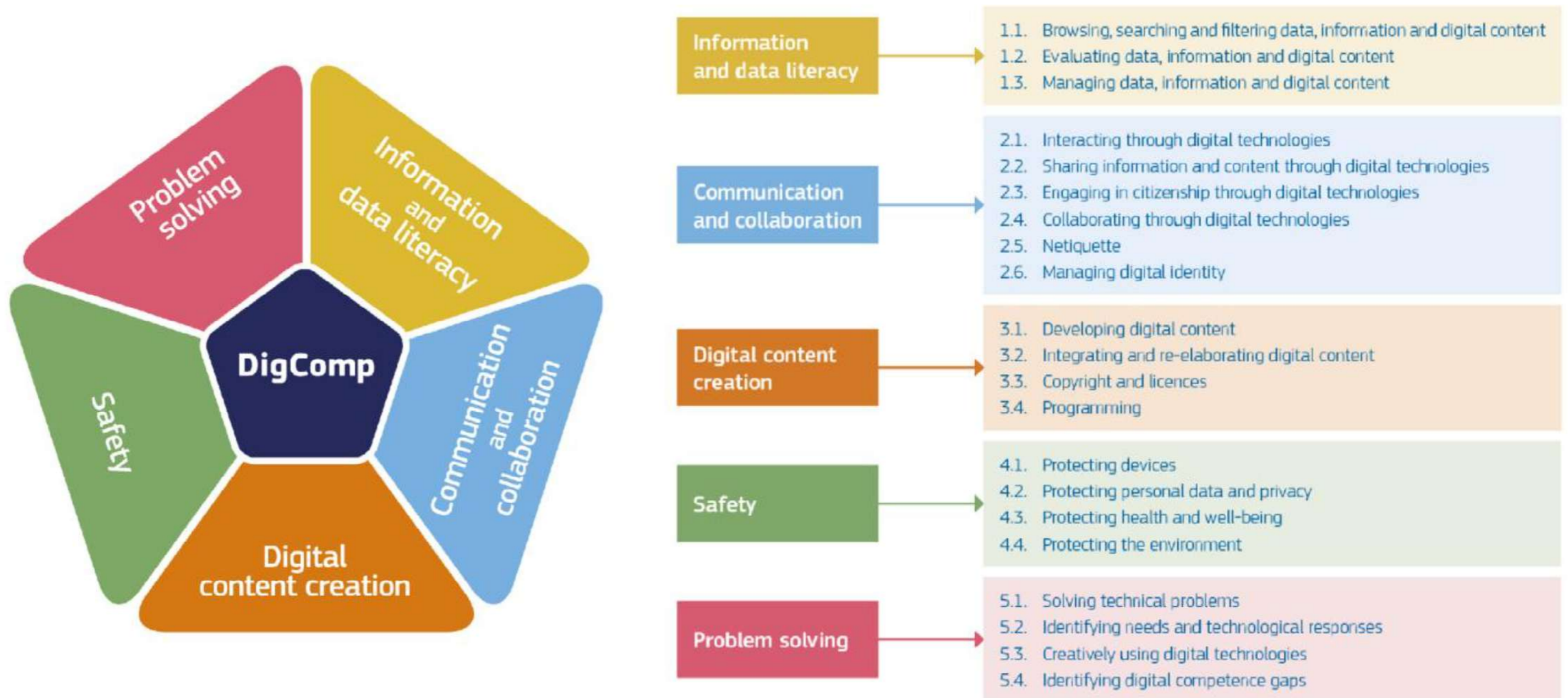


Figure 1: DigComp, the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens. European Commission 2022

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A well-informed and critical young population is essential for a knowledgeable society and a healthy democracy that supports emotional and mental well-being.

For this reason, we consider the following key elements fundamental for achieving digital well-being. Each will be explored in more detail throughout this guide:



Ethics, Digital Empathy, and Digital Inclusion

Helping young people develop the ability to assess the truthfulness of information and to promote tolerance is essential. Preventing hate speech while encouraging respect, empathy, and intercultural understanding of diverse cultures are core competencies. To foster ethical content consumption and creation, it is important to encourage young people to develop transversal skills that involve responsibility, autonomy, and critical thinking.



Education and the Job Market

The acquisition of skills relevant to today's labor market—such as critical thinking, information literacy, and cybercrime awareness—is essential in a world shaped by technology. These skills contribute to the personal and professional development of young people, enriching both their growth and employability.



Data Protection, Safety, and Privacy

Young people must be informed about how their personal data is collected, used, and protected—including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)—as well as the specific safeguards for minors.



Mental and Emotional Well-being

Excessive use of social media can contribute to stress, anxiety, and depression among young people. Therefore, promoting self-awareness, self-regulation, and emotional reflection is crucial in order to offer support in cases of mental health difficulties.



Critical Thinking and Information Assessment

It is essential to equip young people with the ability to critically assess online information and to recognize disinformation, misinformation, and misleading content.



Online Violence

A lack of information and understanding about the use of social media has led to serious problems involving online violence—such as *cyberbullying*, *phishing*, online harassment, *sexting*, and more.

04

**RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH
SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

In the digital age, social media has transformed the way young people interact, access information, and construct their identities. While these platforms offer numerous benefits—such as access to educational resources, peer connection, and creative expression—they also pose a range of risks that can impact adolescents’ emotional, social, and physical well-being.

This section aims to provide professionals working with adolescents a comprehensive overview of the main risks associated with social media use. It will explore the most common issues, their implications for the psychosocial development of young people, and offer prevention and intervention strategies to promote healthy and safe engagement with these platforms.

Psychological and Emotional Risks

Low Self-Esteem and Distorted Self-Image

Social media has reshaped the way people—especially young people and adolescents—perceive their self-worth and physical appearance. Constant exposure to carefully curated and edited content has created increasing pressure to meet unrealistic standards of beauty and success, often leading to low self-esteem and a distorted self-image.

One clear sign of this is the overwhelming presence of images showing seemingly perfect bodies, faces, and lifestyles. Celebrities, influencers, and everyday users alike share photos enhanced by filters, editing apps, and strategic angles that highlight their best features—projecting an image that often bears little resemblance to reality.

This constant bombardment of unattainable ideals can trigger deep feelings of dissatisfaction in adolescents. Young people frequently compare themselves to influencers, models, or even their own friends, overlooking the fact that the images they see online are edited and selectively chosen snapshots of someone’s life—not the full picture.



Eating Disorders (EDs), such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder, are serious conditions that affect a person's relationship with food and body image. Today, the content circulating on social media can significantly contribute to the onset and worsening of these disorders.

Several contributing factors include:

- Promotion of extreme thinness and restrictive diets;
- The impact of social pressure on body image and compulsive eating behaviors.

Sleep, meanwhile, is essential to adolescents' physical, cognitive, and emotional development. However, excessive use of electronic devices—especially before bedtime—has led to a sharp disruption in the sleep patterns of many young people.

Key contributing factors to this issue include:

- The effect of screen exposure on melatonin production;
- Hyperconnectivity and poor sleep hygiene.



One of the main contributors to emotional distress among adolescents is the constant search for validation through social media. The number of likes, comments, and followers has become a metric for self-esteem and social acceptance, generating psychological pressure, heightened anxiety, and in some cases, exacerbating depression.

Social validation impacts mental health through several mechanisms:

- **Dependence on external approval:** The need for positive feedback leads to anxiety when posts don't perform as expected;
- **Constant social comparison:** Teens often compare their lives to others', forgetting that most posts only show curated highlights—not the full reality;
- **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):** The sense that others are enjoying experiences without them causes stress and the compulsive urge to stay constantly connected.

Cyberaddiction is a behavioral disorder characterized by an inability to control online time, which negatively affects daily life. It often manifests through compulsive phone-checking, social media interactions, and a general avoidance of offline activities.

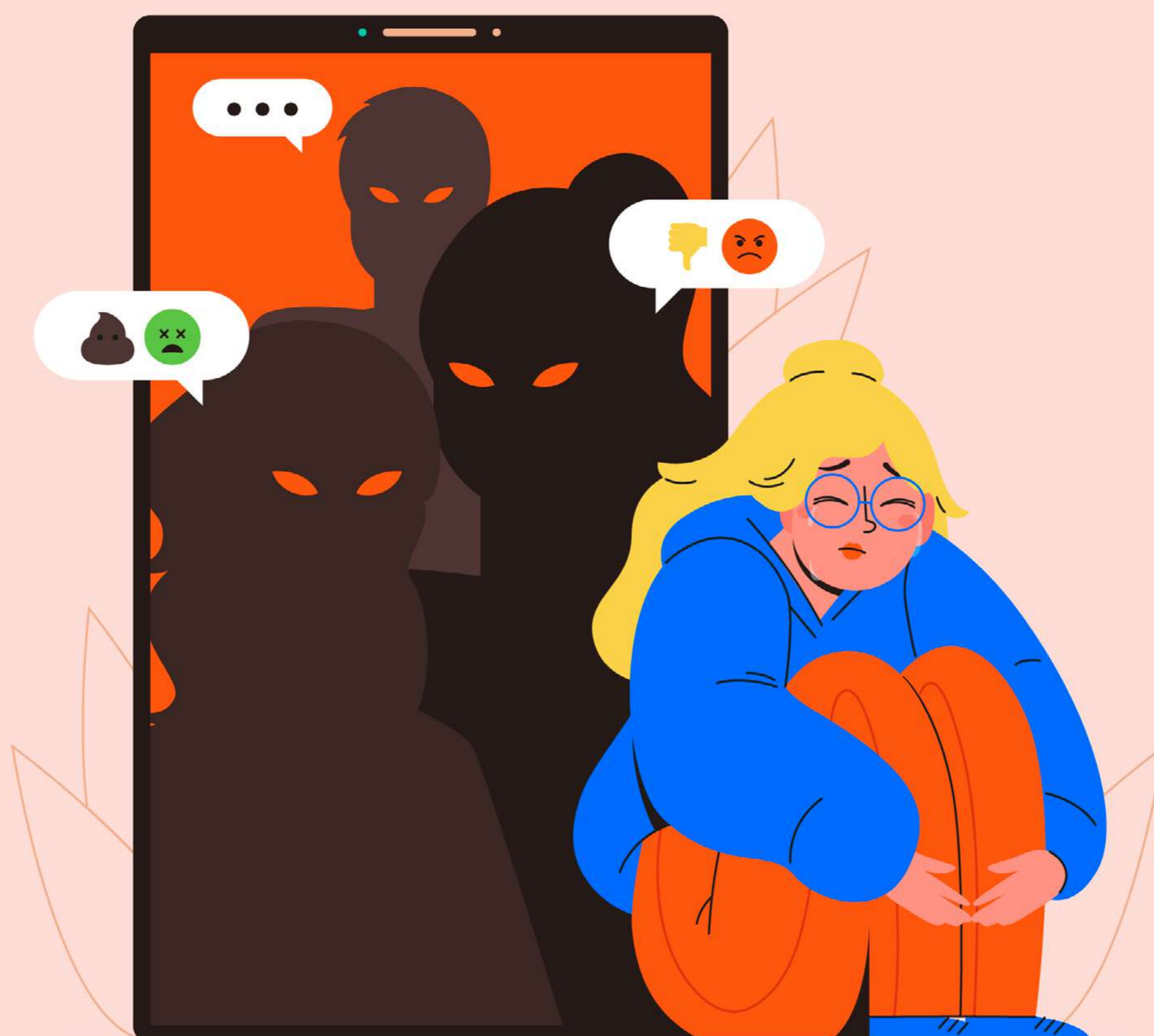
Common indicators include:

- **Loss of control over time spent online:** Difficulty managing time on social platforms, even when it interferes with responsibilities;
- **Social isolation without digital devices:** A preference for online interaction over face-to-face communication;
- **Irritability or anxiety without internet access;**
- **Decline in academic or professional performance:** Decreased focus and productivity due to constant distraction.

Digital platforms are intentionally designed to maximize user interaction and retention using psychological strategies that encourage addictive behavior. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook employ algorithms specifically designed to influence user behavior and increase screen time.

These include:

- **Variable reward systems** That keep users scrolling for hours without noticing;
- **Anticipation of new interactions** That reinforces the urge to check the phone repeatedly;
- **Engagement strategies** That foster a psychological dependency similar to gambling addiction.



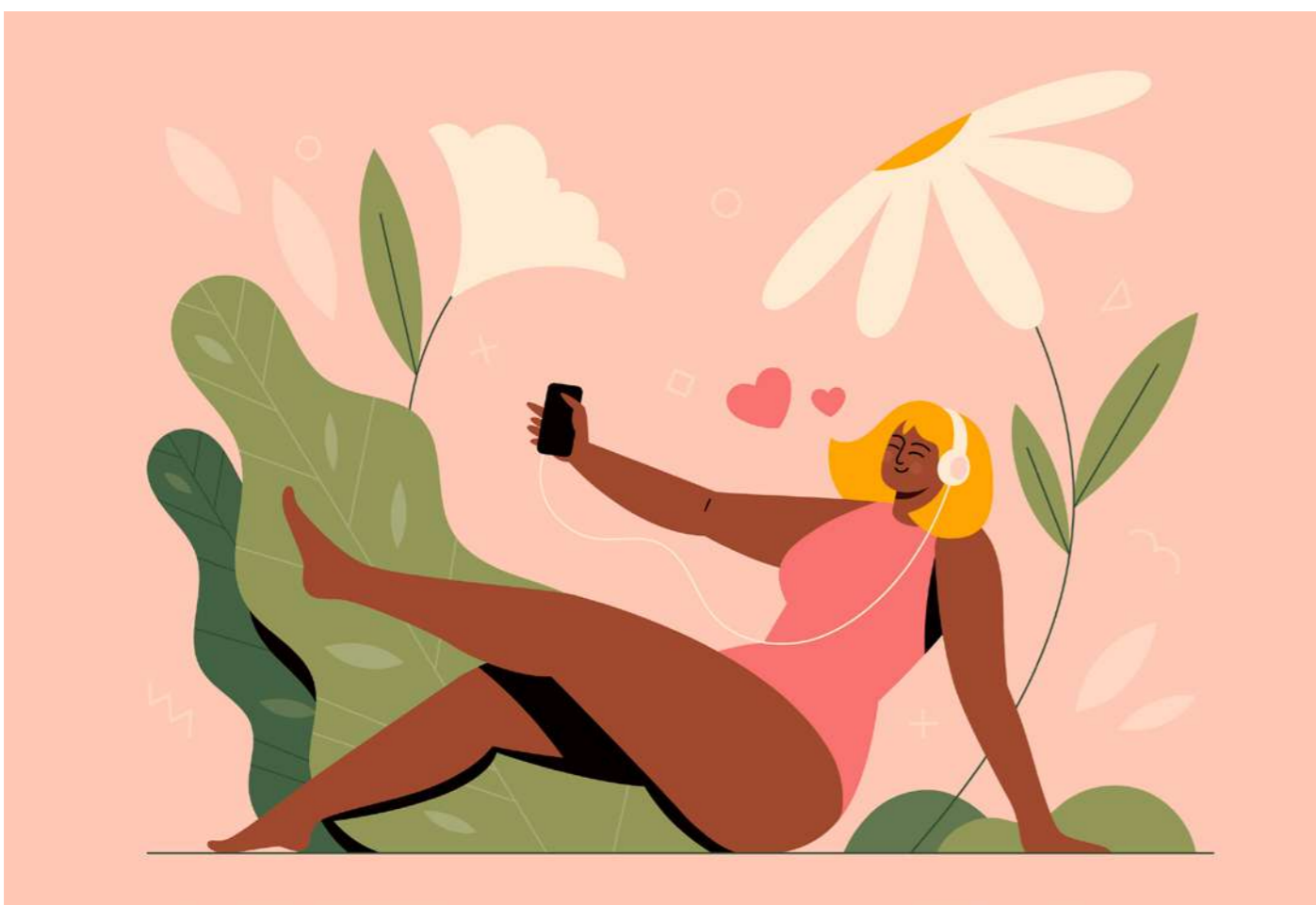
Fear of Missing Out (*FOMO*), is a psychological phenomenon that has intensified with the rise of social media. It refers to the anxiety people—especially young individuals—feel when they believe others are enjoying rewarding experiences without them. This fear leads to a compulsive need to stay constantly connected, checking updates and participating in activities to avoid the feeling of being left out.

FOMO has become a widespread issue due to several contributing factors, including:

- Constant use of social media;
- The need for social validation;
- Peer pressure and the culture of immediacy.



Perfect Life Syndrome



Perfect Life Syndrome is a psychological issue that arises when individuals idealize others' lives on social media and begin to perceive their own existence as less interesting, successful, or meaningful by comparison.

Adolescents—who are in a critical phase of emotional development and identity formation—are particularly vulnerable to this syndrome. Digital platforms typically showcase an edited and highly selective version of reality, which fosters unrealistic expectations and feelings of frustration.

This idealization is mainly driven by:

- **Selective content sharing:** People tend to post only the highlights of their lives, omitting sadness, challenges, or everyday struggles;
- **Use of filters and editing:** Photos are often modified to enhance appearance and present a more attractive version of reality;
- **Construction of a “perfect” digital identity:** Many young people strive to project an idealized self-image that aligns with social media's standards of success;
- **Positive reinforcement through likes and comments:** Social validation via engagement encourages users to display only the most positive aspects of their lives.

Digital fatigue refers to the mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion caused by excessive use of technology and constant exposure to digital stimuli. While it can affect people of all ages, adolescents and young adults are particularly susceptible due to their heavy reliance on electronic devices in daily life.

Digital fatigue is a multifactorial problem rooted in several aspects of hyperconnectivity, such as:

- **Information overload and cognitive saturation;**
- **Excessive screen time and sensory overstimulation.**

The effects of digital fatigue are noticeable not only in academic performance but also in the social and emotional well-being of adolescents.



Addictions: Pornography, Gambling, and Video Games

► Pornography



In the digital age, the immediate availability of online content has facilitated the development of addictive behaviors related to pornography, gambling, and video games. When practiced without control, these activities can lead to psychological dependency, negatively impacting the cognitive, emotional, and social development of adolescents and young adults.

Moreover, phenomena such as **doomscrolling** (the compulsive consumption of negative news) and **binge-watching** (marathon viewing of series or videos) have intensified the struggle to manage time and maintain a balanced connection with the offline world.

Online pornography consumption has increased exponentially due to its easy accessibility and, in many cases, the lack of parental controls. Frequent exposure to this type of content can affect psychological development, distort perceptions of sexuality, and harm interpersonal relationships.

► Gambling

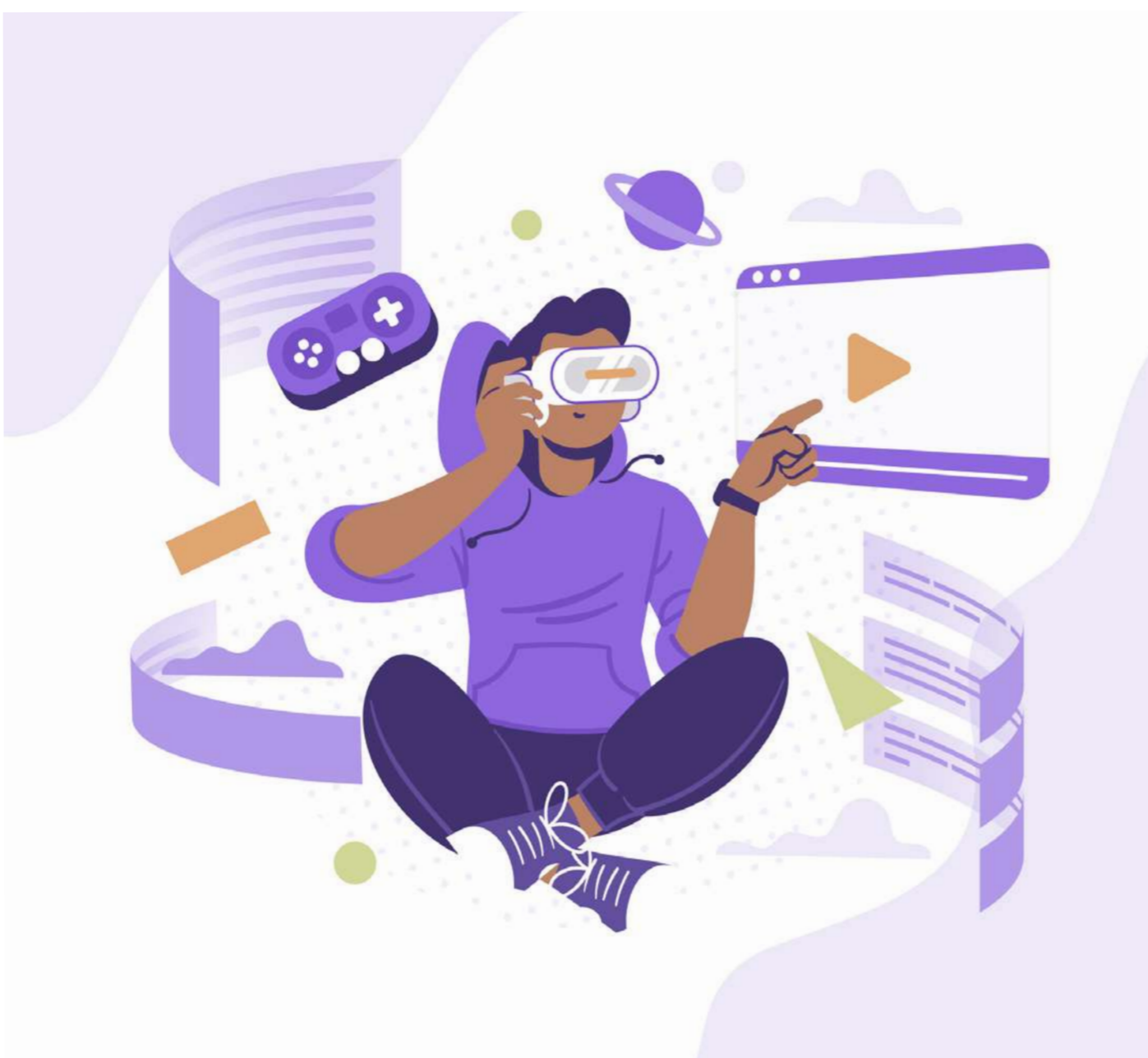


Online gambling platforms have become increasingly popular among young people, particularly through virtual casinos, games with microtransactions, and sports betting. The ease of access and the illusion of quick financial gain have contributed to a rise in digital gambling addiction.

Key factors contributing to gambling addiction among youth include:

- **Intermittent reinforcement:** Similar to physical casinos, digital platforms use reward mechanisms that reinforce addictive behavior;
- **Aggressive advertising:** Many platforms offer “welcome bonuses” and promotional offers specifically designed to attract new users;
- **Normalization of gambling:** The gamification of betting and the presence of “loot boxes” in video games further reinforce compulsive behavior.

► Video Games



Video games have evolved into a global industry that captivates millions of players, especially young people. While they can be a healthy form of entertainment, in some cases they can lead to dependency and compulsive behavior.

Factors that contribute to video game addiction include:

- **Addictive design:** Games are created to retain user attention for extended periods through progressive reward systems;
- **Online social interaction:** Many online games foster constant interaction with other players, making it difficult to disconnect;
- **Escapism:** Some adolescents use video games as a way to avoid emotional or social problems in their daily lives.

Some Consequences of Psychological and Emotional Risks

- Development of emotional disorders such as **depression and anxiety**, and negative emotions like **frustration and hopelessness**.
- Emotional exhaustion, feelings of loneliness, and loss of social skills.
- **Social isolation**, difficulties in **relationships and interpersonal communication**, and disconnection from offline life.
- Feelings of inferiority, **low self-confidence, and low self-esteem** due to perceiving their appearance or lifestyle as less “perfect” than others’.
- Problems with **concentration** and productivity, resulting in decreased academic performance.
- **Hopelessness** or pressure to meet unattainable standards, driven by the belief that everyone else is leading a more successful life.
- **Sleep disturbances** caused by prolonged mobile phone use before bed, affecting sleep cycles.
- **Unrealistic expectations** about relationships: Digital interactions are often idealized, making it harder to form authentic connections in real life.
- **Chronic dissatisfaction** with one’s appearance due to constant exposure to “enhanced” versions of oneself on social media, leading to lower self-image in real life.
- Development of **digital body dysmorphia**, a disorder where individuals obsess over modifying their appearance online to match an idealized version of themselves.
- Increased demand for **cosmetic procedures**, as many teens seek to look like their edited online images.
- **Aggressiveness and frustration**: In some cases, video games can increase irritability and reduce tolerance to frustration.
- Sedentary behavior and **health issues** due to excessive screen time and lack of physical activity.
- Distorted perceptions of **sexuality**: Adolescents may develop unrealistic ideas about intimacy and romantic relationships.
- **Desensitization** and the need for more extreme content: Repeated exposure can lead to tolerance and a desire for increasingly explicit material.



Privacy and Safety Risks on Social Media

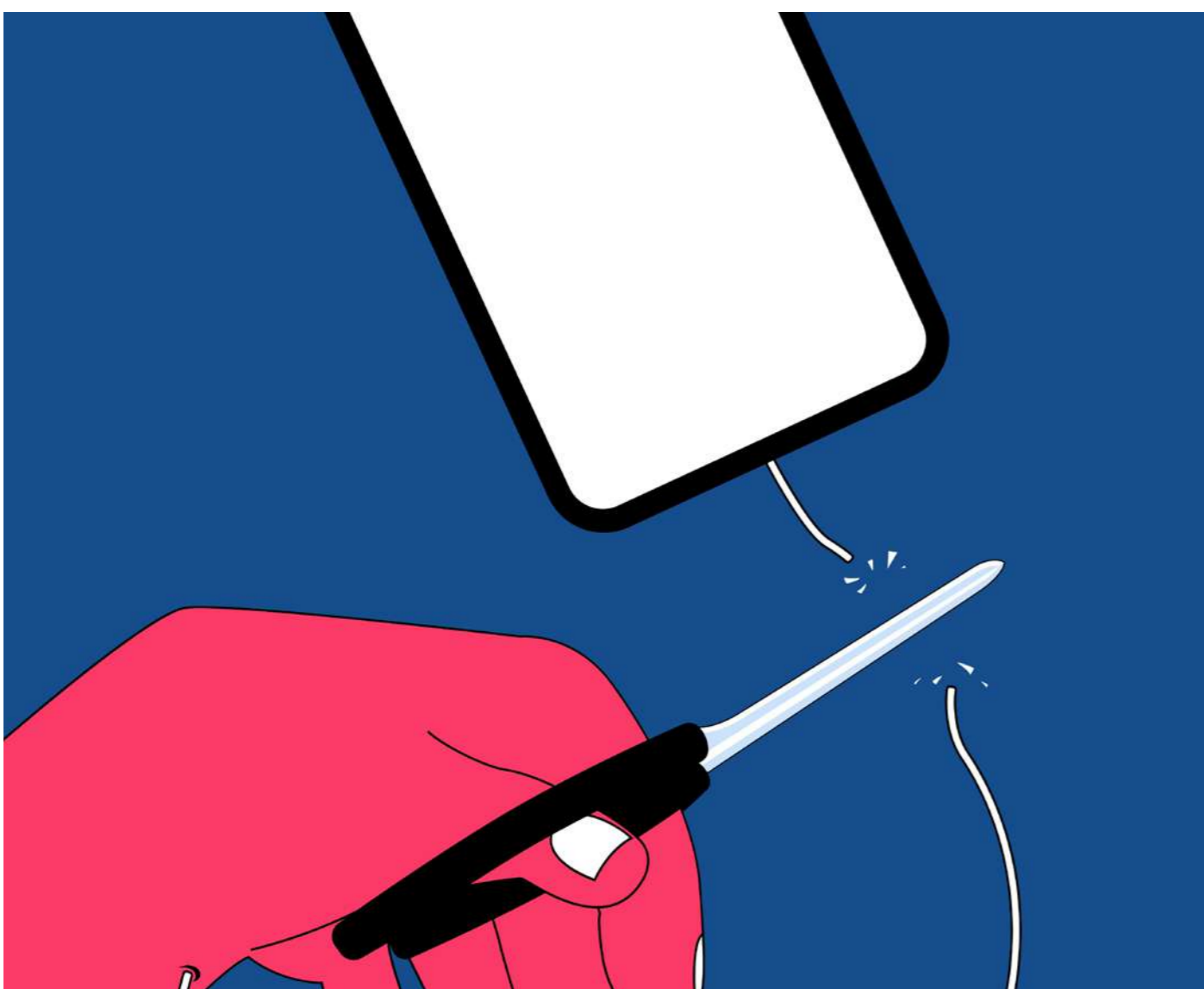
Lack of awareness or preventive measures around digital privacy can lead to identity theft, *cyberbullying*, *impersonation*, *blackmail*, and other *cybercrimes*.

When users share information on social media, they are often unaware of the reach and permanence of that data online.

Types of vulnerable personal information include:

- 👤 **Profile data:** Full name, date of birth, email address, phone number.
- 🕒 **Real-time location:** Posts with geolocation activated can reveal a person's movements.
- 📷 **Personal photos and videos:** These can be manipulated, used without consent, or even for extortion.
- 💳 **Financial information:** Sharing bank details or credit card information on unsecured platforms can lead to fraud.

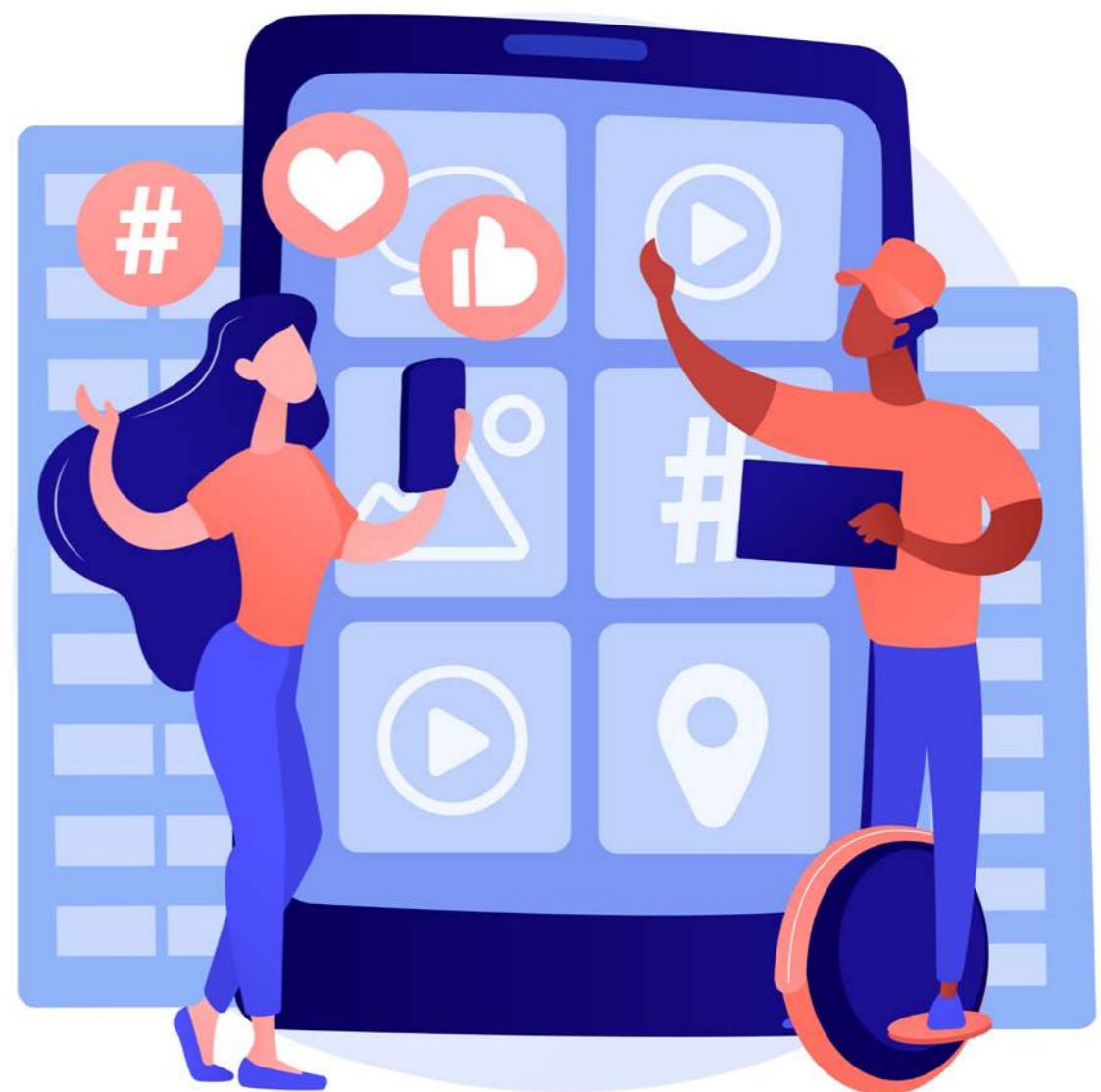
► Deepfakes and Digital Manipulation



The term *deepfake* combines “*deep learning*” and “*fake*” and refers to AI-generated audiovisual content that recreates faces, voices, and movements with astonishing realism. When used maliciously, this technology raises serious concerns about privacy, ethics, and disinformation. Technologies used in social media to produce deepfakes include:

- **Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs):** AI algorithms that train neural *networks* to enhance the quality and realism of fake content;
- **AI-based voice modeling:** Real voice recordings are used to create audio in which a person appears to say things they never actually said;
- **Advanced facial editing:** Faces are superimposed onto others in videos, making it seem as if someone performed actions they never did.

► Exposure to Harmful Content on Social Media



Social media platforms are designed to maximize user interaction and screen time, which can lead adolescents to unintentionally encounter harmful content such as:

- Explicit violence and sensitive material;
- Hate speech and radicalization;
- Viral challenges and risky behaviors.

► Digital Footprint



A digital footprint is the trail of information a person leaves behind on the internet—both consciously and unconsciously. It consists of everything we post, share, or interact with, including photos, comments, search history, website registrations, and social media activity.

There are two main types:

- **Active Digital Footprint:** Information intentionally published by the user;
- **Passive Digital Footprint:** Data collected without the user's full awareness.

► Identity Theft



Identify theft is a crime in which someone uses another person's personal information without consent to commit fraud, deceive others, or engage in illegal activities. With the rise of social media and widespread access to personal data online, this has become one of the greatest threats in the digital realm.

Common methods of identity theft include:

- **Theft of personal data:** Collected through social media, email, or leaked databases;
- **Phishing and social engineering attacks:** Fake emails or messages trick people into revealing private information like passwords or credit card numbers;
- **Account hacking:** Use of malware or password cracking to gain access to social media or email accounts;
- **Fake profile creation (catfishing):** Using someone else's photos and data to deceive others on social media or dating apps;
- **Financial fraud:** Criminals use stolen data to apply for loans, make online purchases, or open bank accounts in someone else's name.

Consequences of Privacy and Security Risks on Social Media

- Anxiety and stress, especially in catfishing cases where victims have emotionally invested in a fake relationship;
- Financial and legal risks;
- Threats to personal safety and privacy;
- Defamation, identity theft, digital fraud, disinformation, and fake news;
- Non-consensual use of personal images;

- Loss of trust and fear of interacting online;
- Damage to personal reputation and social consequences: it can be difficult to regain control over hacked accounts or repair one's digital reputation when identity is used to defame or commit crimes;
- Desensitization and normalization of online violence;
- Theft of funds, fraudulent purchases using stolen financial data, difficulty proving one's identity, or facing legal consequences.

Toxic Relationships and Online Violence

Social media has transformed the way adolescents and young people experience emotional and romantic relationships.

While these platforms can strengthen communication and connections, they can also foster toxic dynamics and emotional dependency.

Social networks allow constant monitoring of others' activity, which can lead to controlling behaviors, jealousy, and possessiveness in relationships.

Online Violence and Cyberbullying



Cyberbullying is a form of harassment that takes place through social media, messaging apps, forums, and online gaming platforms, where aggressors insult, threaten, humiliate, or exclude their victims—often causing severe psychological consequences. Since this type of violence has no physical boundaries and can occur 24/7, its impact on adolescents' emotional well-being can be devastating.

It is essential to raise awareness about the effects of digital harassment, encourage reporting, and promote a culture of respect in online environments to prevent this type of violence.

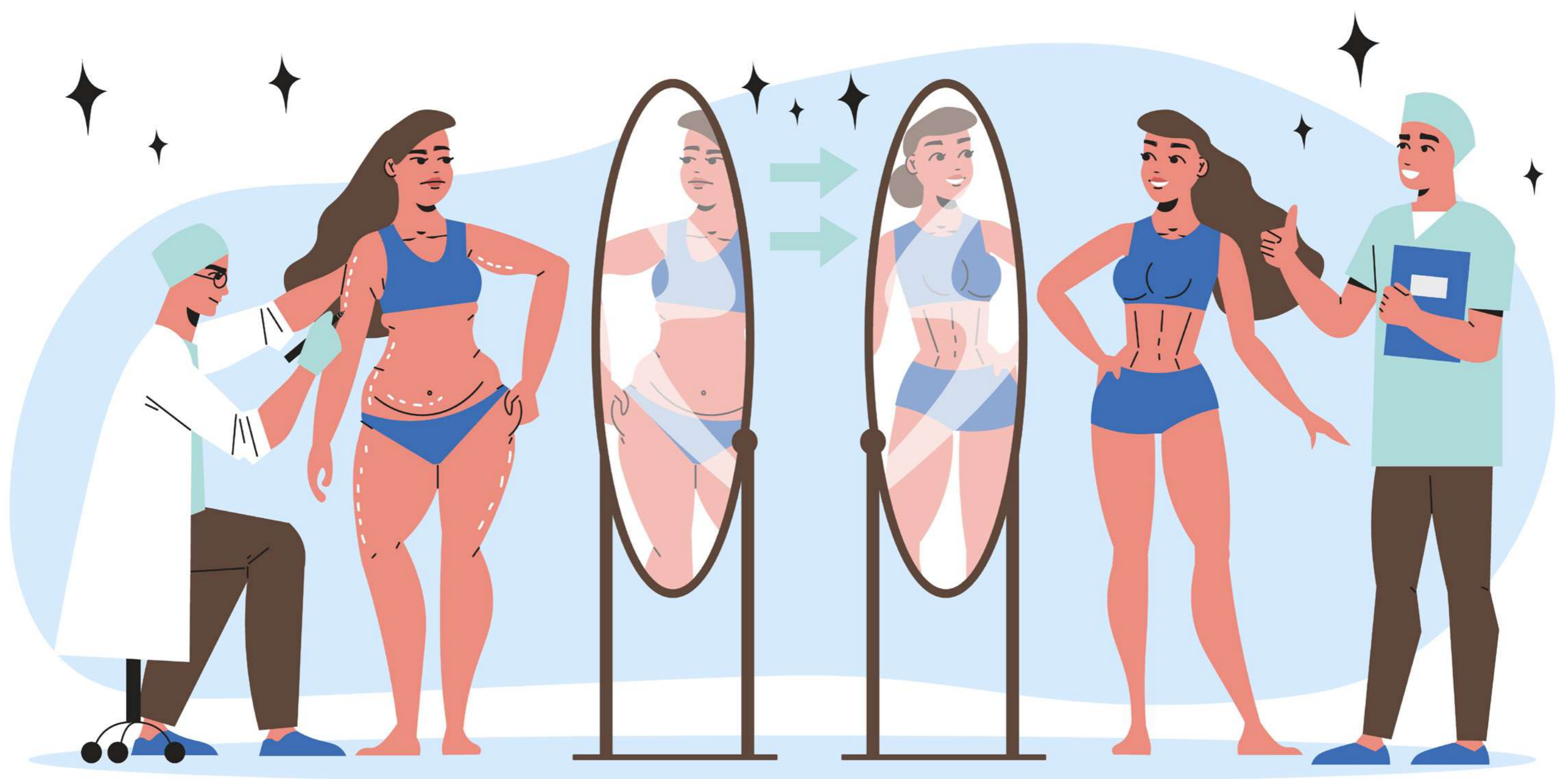
Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying does not require physical contact and can be anonymous, making it more difficult to detect and stop.

Cyberbullying can have serious emotional consequences, as victims may feel trapped and hopeless. In extreme cases, it has been linked to self-harm and suicidal thoughts, highlighting the urgency of prioritizing prevention and intervention.

Common forms of online violence include:

- Harassment and threats
- Public insults and humiliation
- Digital social exclusion
- Spreading rumors and misinformation
- Identity theft and digital manipulation

Public Shaming, Cancel Culture, and Body Shaming



Social media has given voice to millions, allowing for communication and the exchange of ideas. However, it has also fueled a culture of public shaming and punishment, where mistakes, opinions, or physical appearances become targets of massive attacks.

Public shaming, cancel culture, and body shaming have normalized destructive criticism, social exclusion, and relentless judgment in the online space. It is vital to understand the impact of these dynamics and promote respectful digital interaction.

In many cases, the backlash is disproportionate, turning a minor issue into a viral crisis. Social media amplifies this effect, as information spreads rapidly, leaving little room for reflection or the right to defend oneself.

Gaslighting, Trolling, Doxxing, Vishing, Phishing, Smishing, and Whaling: Strategies of Digital Manipulation and Deception



Digital *gaslighting* is a form of psychological manipulation in which the aggressor causes the victim to doubt their own perception, memory, or judgment—resulting in confusion and loss of self-trust.

How digital gaslighting works:

- **Contradictory messages:** The aggressor denies having said something or changes their version of events to make the victim question their memory;
- **Minimizing feelings:** The victim's emotions are ridiculed or dismissed, making them feel they are overreacting;
- **Manipulating conversations online:** Messages are deleted or altered to change the narrative of a discussion.



Doxxing involves publishing or leaking someone's private information without consent, with the intent to harass or endanger them.

How *doxxers* obtain this information:

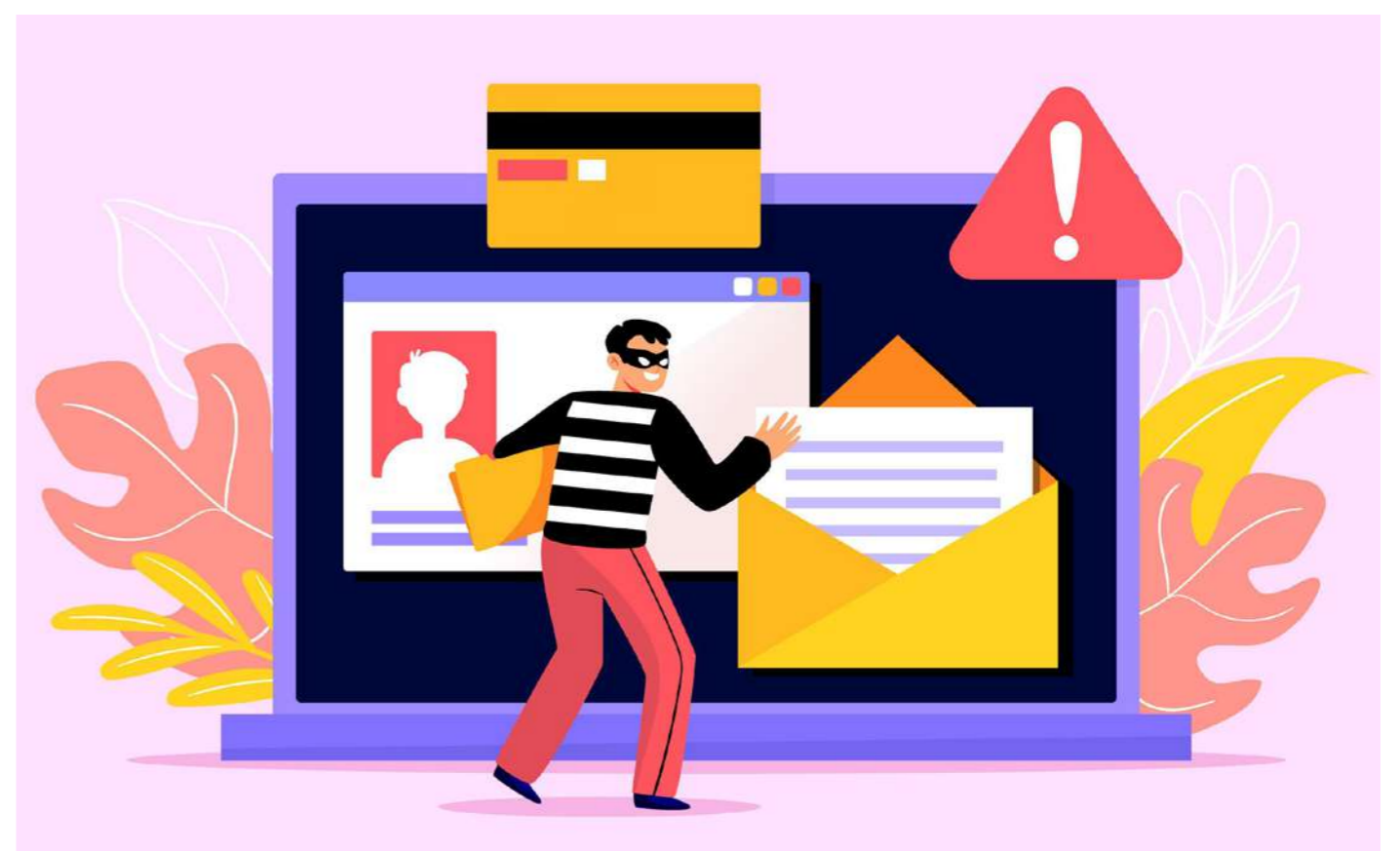
- From social networks where users openly share personal data;
- Through social engineering attacks designed to trick victims into revealing sensitive details;
- Via hacking or leaked databases.



Trolling is the intentional act of provoking, insulting, or sparking conflict in forums, social media, and online platforms.

Trolls typically:

- Post offensive or provocative comments to anger or upset others;
- Use anonymous accounts to avoid consequences;
- Spread hate or misinformation to polarize communities.



Types of Cyberattacks Involving Identity Theft:

- **Phishing:** Fraudulent emails designed to steal personal information;
- **Smishing:** *Phishing* through SMS/text messages;
- **Vishing:** Voice *phishing* scams conducted over phone calls;
- **Whaling:** Targeted *phishing* attacks aimed at high-profile individuals.

“

Online extortion involves using threats or coercion to obtain money, personal information, or favors from a person

There are various types of digital extortion, including:



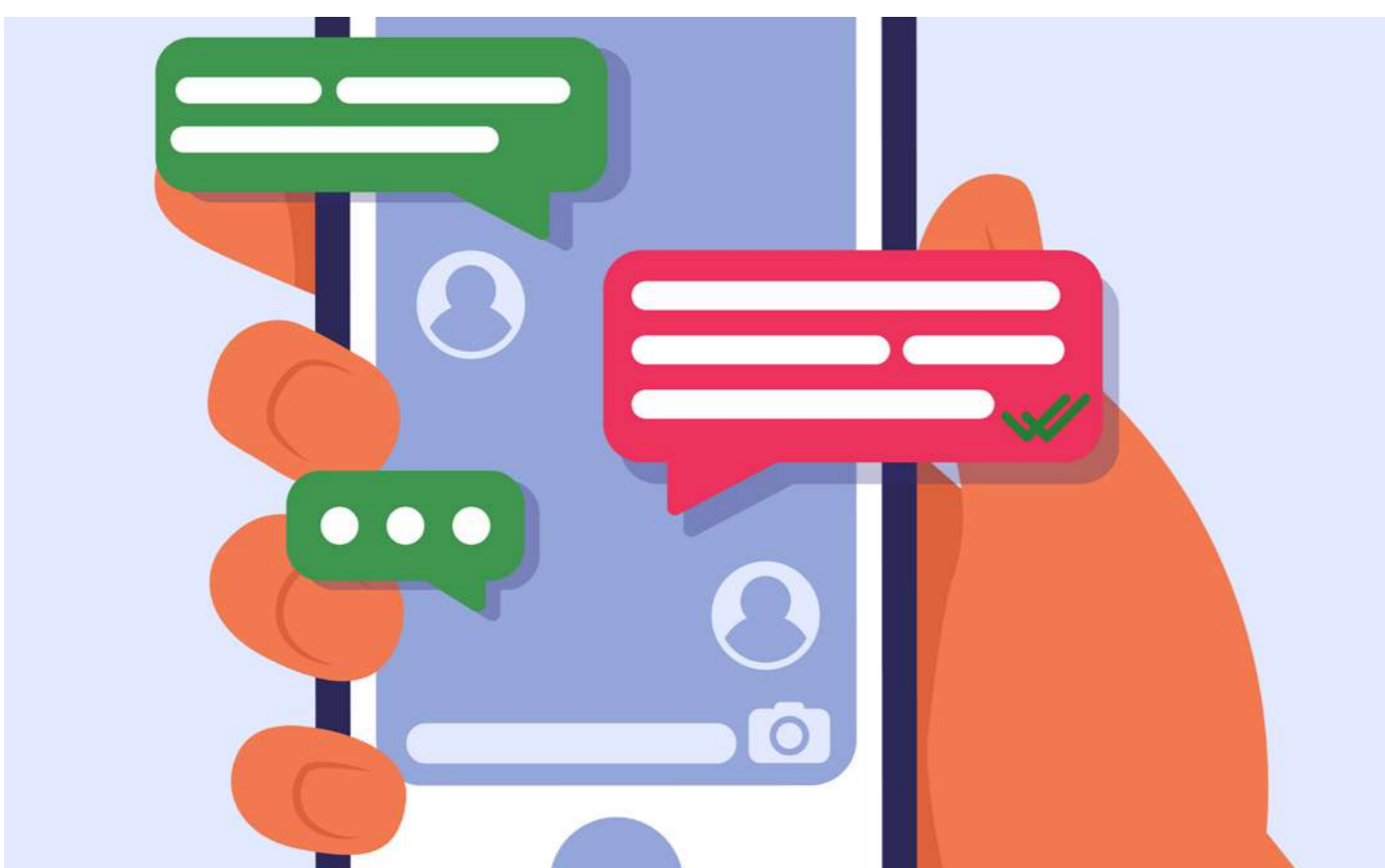
Sextortion

A form of digital abuse in which criminals obtain intimate material and use it to blackmail the victim.



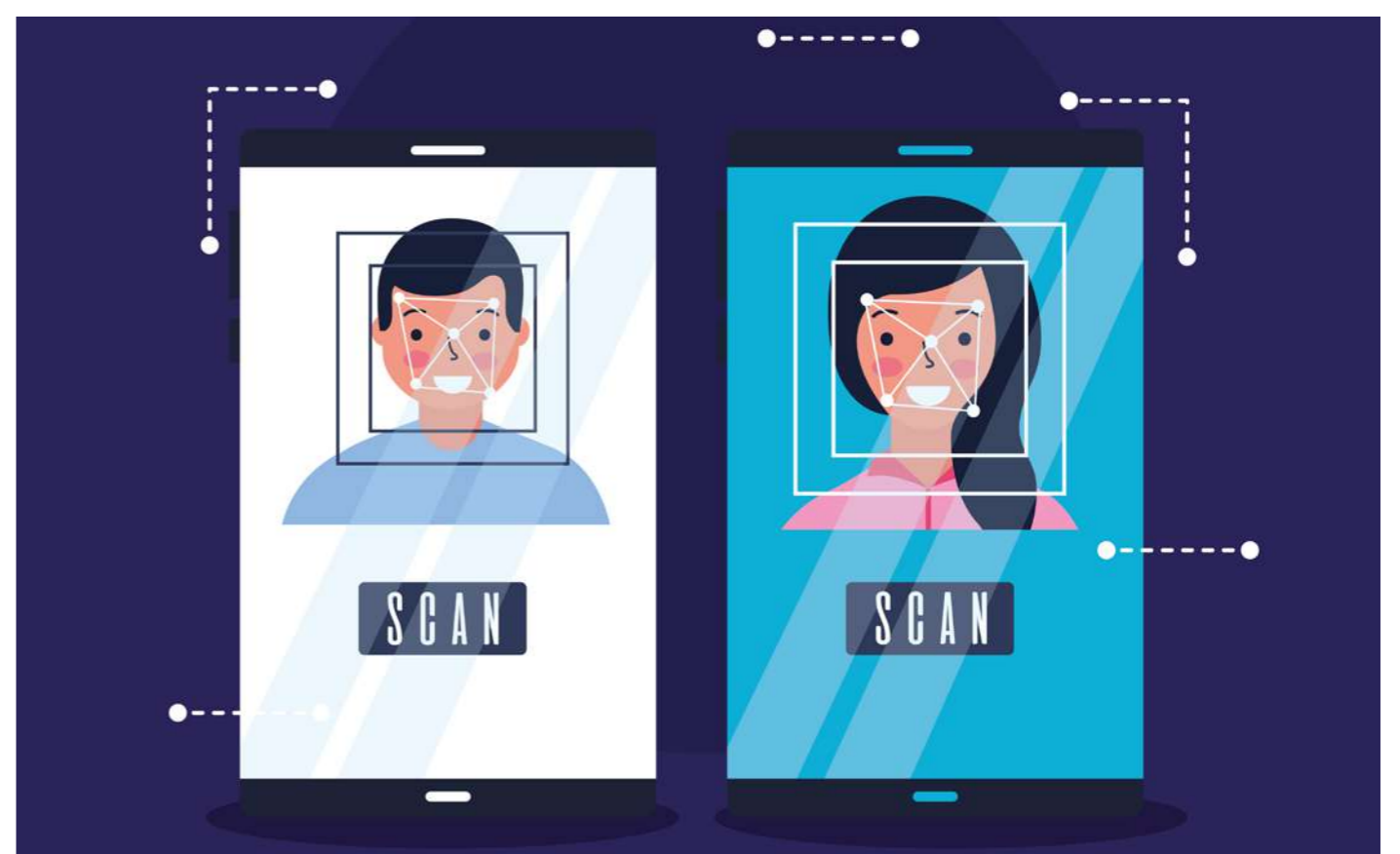
Financial Extortion

Threatening to release private or sensitive information unless a ransom is paid. This often involves fake emails attempting to manipulate the victim into complying.



Fake Blackmailing

Sending fraudulent messages claiming to possess compromising material, even when it isn't true. The aggressor tries to induce panic and prompt payment without verification.



Impersonation-Based Extortion

Creating a fake profile using the victim's image and threatening to spread false or damaging content unless compensation is provided.

Consequences of Toxic Relationships and Online Violence on Social Media

- Anxiety, depression, and stress, especially among teens exposed to constant criticism about their appearance;
- Fear of loneliness and both social and digital isolation;
- Fear of public exposure, self-censorship, and suppression of self-expression;
- Reduced self-esteem and a negative body image;
- Development of Eating Disorders (EDs) such as anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating due to pressure to meet beauty standards;
- Suicidal thoughts;
- Harassment and threats both online and offline;

- Risk of identity theft or fraud;
- Increased vulnerability to manipulation: Accepting controlling or jealous behaviors just to maintain the relationship online;
- Pursuit of an idealized partner, which can lead to tolerating manipulative dynamics to match that fantasy;
- Difficulty identifying healthy relationships, as the concept of love is shaped by unrealistic narratives;
- Loss of self-confidence;
- Constant doubts about one's own memory and judgment;
- Emotional dependence on the abuser.



Risks of Social Media in Child Trafficking (Recruitment and Exploitation by Criminal Networks)

Social media has improved communication and access to information, but it has also been exploited by criminal organizations to recruit and exploit minors.

Human trafficking networks have found

in digital platforms an effective tool for identifying, manipulating, and exploiting victims—whether for sexual exploitation, forced labor, begging, drug trafficking, or other criminal activities.

The anonymity and ease of creating

fake profiles make minors especially vulnerable to these tactics. It is essential to educate adolescents on these risks, promote digital supervision, and strengthen online protection strategies.

Human Trafficking, Prostitution, and Exploitation on Digital Platforms

Social networks and digital platforms have opened new avenues for sexual exploitation and trafficking, facilitating the recruitment of minors through deception, emotional manipulation, and false promises.

Platforms such as OnlyFans, dating apps, and social media have been used by trafficking networks to lure, manipulate, and control young people—exposing them to non-consensual pornography, forced prostitution, and sexual trafficking.

Criminal organizations use sophisticated strategies to attract and control minors until they become victims of exploitation, including:

- Emotional manipulation and *grooming*;
- Fake job or modeling offers;
- Extortion and blackmail (sextortion or fake debts);
- Use of video games and messaging apps as channels for recruitment.



Warning Signs and Consequences

Often, minors do not report these situations due to fear, shame, or manipulation by the abuser. For this reason, teachers, families, and professionals must be able to recognize warning signs and intervene early.

Behavioral and emotional changes can signal that a minor is being manipulated, harassed, or exploited online.

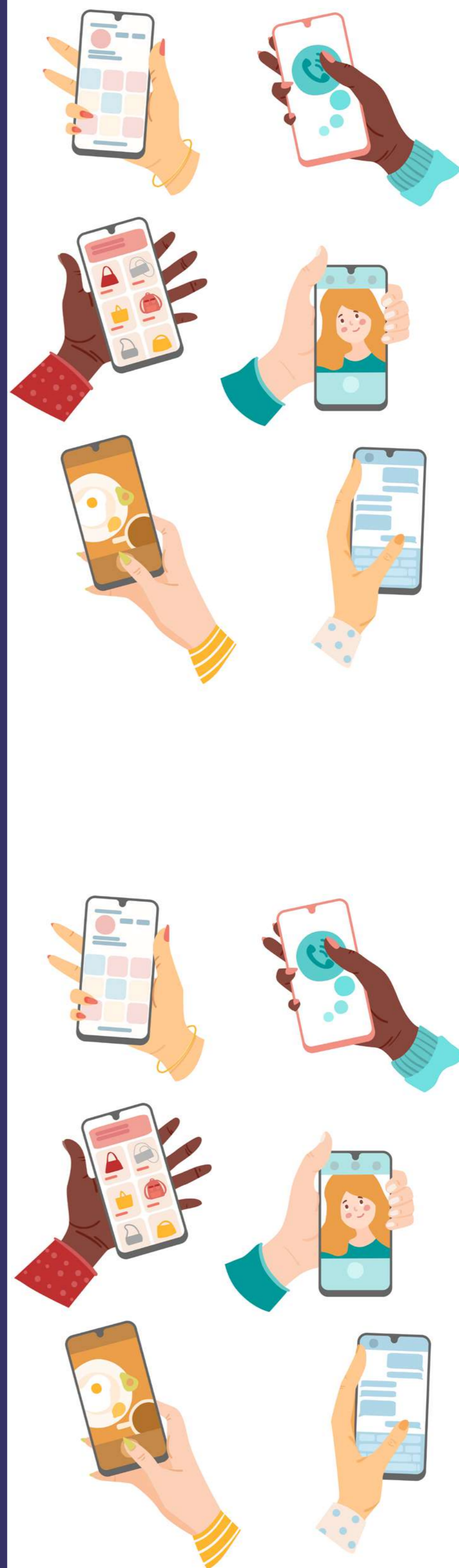
Common indicators include:

Cambios de comportamiento y estado emocional:

- Mood swings or changes in emotional state;
- Unexplained anxiety or stress;
- Sudden sadness or depression, especially after using a phone or social media;
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities;
- Frequent irritability or anger;
- Social withdrawal and reluctance to talk about personal matters;
- Secrecy around mobile or computer use;
- Excessive use of social media or messaging apps at unusual hours (especially late at night);
- Hiding the screen when others approach or quickly switching apps;
- Frequently deleting conversations or browsing history;
- Using encrypted messaging apps for private conversations;
- Receiving nervous calls or messages from unknown numbers.

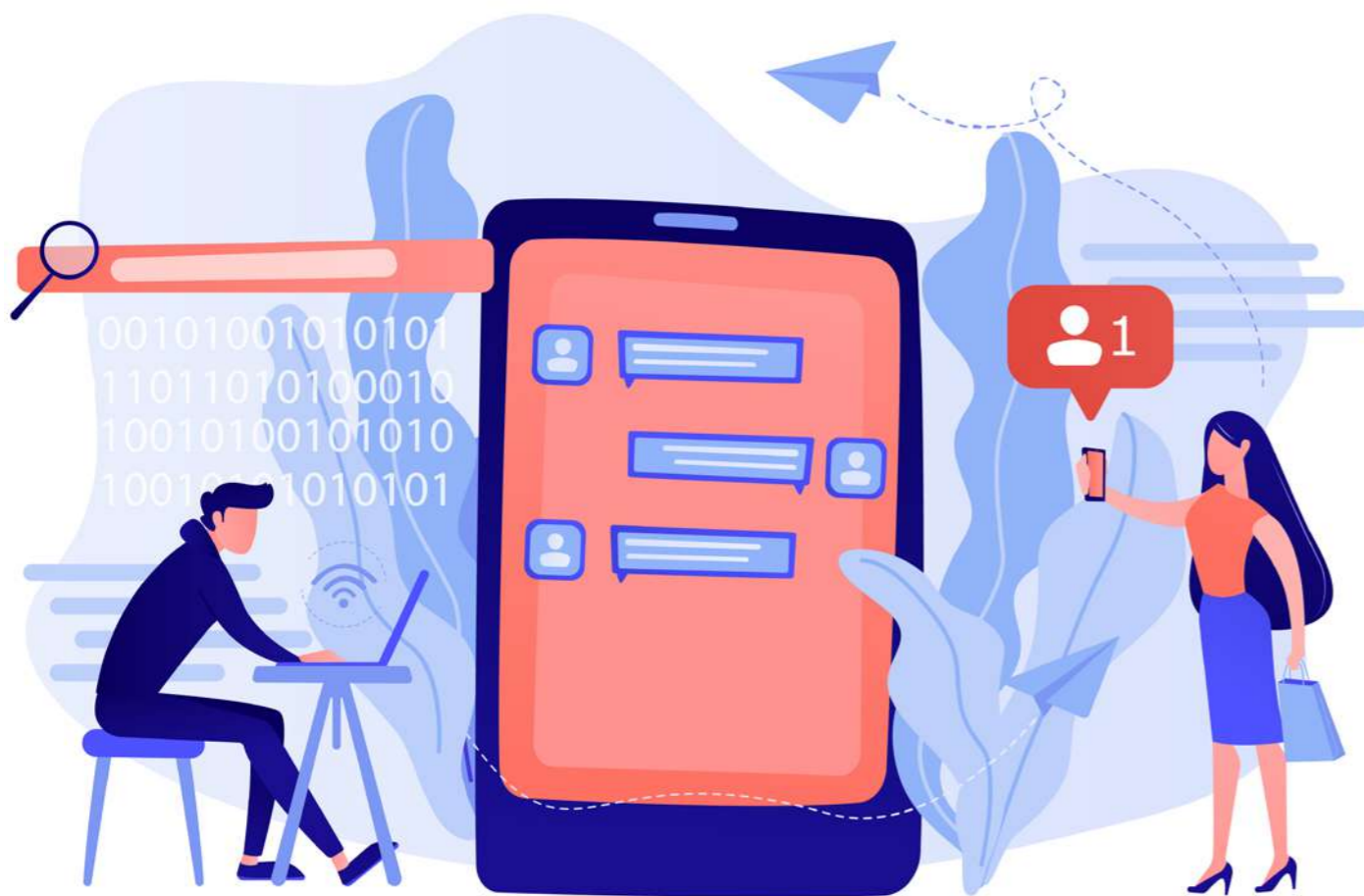
Other red flags include:

- Changes in school or social routines;
- Drop in academic performance or disengagement from school;
- Avoiding contact with friends or family for no apparent reason;
- Difficulty concentrating or irregular sleep patterns;
- Repeated unexplained absences from school or activities;
- Contact with unknown adults or ties to suspicious individuals;
- Receiving gifts, money, or promises from people outside the family circle;
- Talking frequently about a new person who “understands” or “helps” them;
- Expressing plans to secretly meet or travel to see someone they met online;
- Appearing worried or scared after certain online interactions.



Digital Manipulation and Disinformation

Digital manipulation refers to the use of psychological tactics, fake news, and algorithmic tools to influence people's emotions, beliefs, and behaviors. Disinformation spreads through online platforms and can have serious societal consequences.



Biased Algorithms and Echo Chambers

Social media and digital platforms use personalization algorithms that analyze user behavior to present content based on interests and preferences. While this can help filter relevant information, it also has negative effects: reinforcing existing beliefs, limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints, and contributing to polarization and radicalization.

An echo chamber is a digital space where users are only exposed to information that aligns with their views, excluding opposing or alternative opinions.

These are created through:

- **Content Personalization:** Algorithms filter out contradictory opinions;
- **Selective Interaction:** Users follow accounts and pages that reflect their own beliefs;
- **Reinforced Opinions:** Seeing only content that confirms one's worldview leads users to believe their perspective is the only truth.

Influencer Impact and Toxic Role Models on Social Media

Social media has given rise to a new generation of influential figures—**influencers**. These content creators can reach millions of followers and shape trends, opinions, and consumption habits. However, not all influence is positive. Some influencers promote harmful behaviors such as excessive consumerism, medical misinformation, unrealistic beauty standards, and the normalization of toxic or abusive relationships.

Factors that amplify their influence include:

- **Emotional connection:** Influencers present themselves as “virtual friends,” creating a false sense of intimacy;
- **Constant exposure:** Followers view their content daily, reinforcing their influence;
- **False authenticity:** Many influencers only share positive aspects of their lives, creating unrealistic expectations;
- **Validation power:** Teens seek acceptance and recognition, making them more susceptible to trends promoted by influencers.

To mitigate these risks, it's essential to educate young people in **critical thinking and content literacy**, promoting decision-making autonomy and a balanced view of reality.

Fake News

Fake news refers to false or manipulated information presented as real, with the intent to deceive, manipulate, or influence people. It spreads primarily through social media, blogs, messaging platforms, and unreliable websites.

Different forms of fake news include:

- **Intentional disinformation:** False content created to manipulate public opinion;
- **Misinformation:** Incorrect information shared unintentionally (e.g., unverified health claims);
- **Clickbait and sensationalist headlines:** Designed to generate traffic through exaggerated or misleading titles;
- **Manipulated images and videos;**
- **Fake accounts and bots:** Profiles created to spread disinformation at scale.



Consequences of Digital Manipulation and Disinformation

- Health-related misinformation (e.g., about vaccines, treatments, diets);
- Political manipulation and social unrest;
- Impulsive and irresponsible consumption habits;
- Social pressure or anxiety over keeping up with trends;

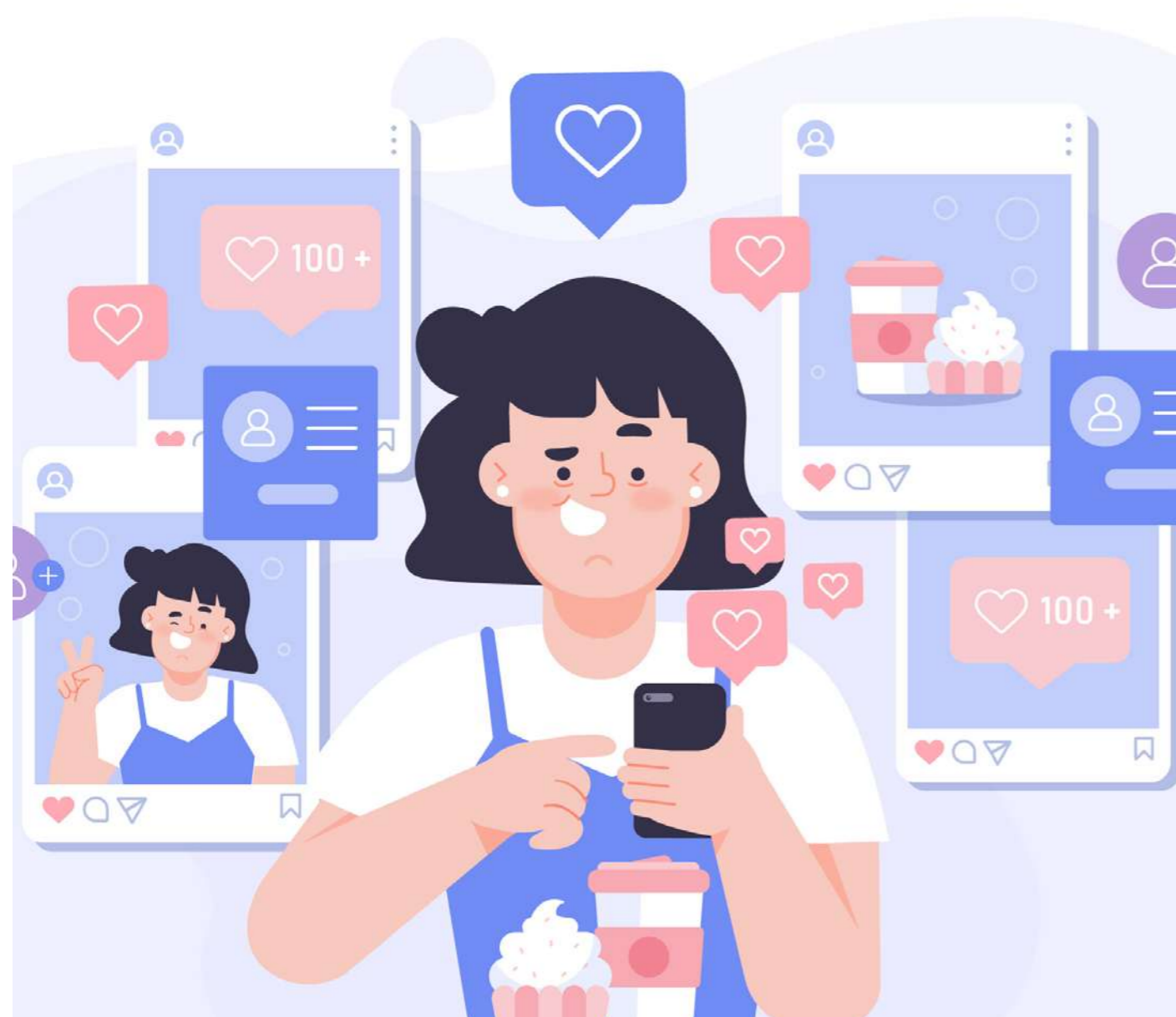
- Normalization of substance use without medical supervision;
- Social polarization: deepening divisions between opposing ideological groups;
- Radicalization: extreme opinions are reinforced and normalized in closed environments;
- Prioritization of intense emotions like outrage and fear to boost engagement;
- Viral spread of fake news and conspiracy theories that outperform verified information.



05

**IDENTIFYING RISKY BEHAVIORS
IN YOUNG PEOPLE**

Warning Signs (Indicators) Related to Problematic Situations in Adolescents



Warning signs associated with behavioral issues in adolescents are indicators that something may be negatively affecting their emotional, social, or psychological well-being. During adolescence, it is common for young people to go through behavioral changes as part of the transition into adulthood. However, when these changes become persistent, intense, or start interfering with daily life, they may reflect deeper issues such as bullying, neglect, family conflict, social exclusion, physical illnesses, and more.

Identifying these signs early is essential to providing the right support and preventing long-term negative consequences. In this context, it is crucial to pay attention to certain behavioral patterns that could indicate emotional disorders, relationship problems, academic difficulties, or other issues.

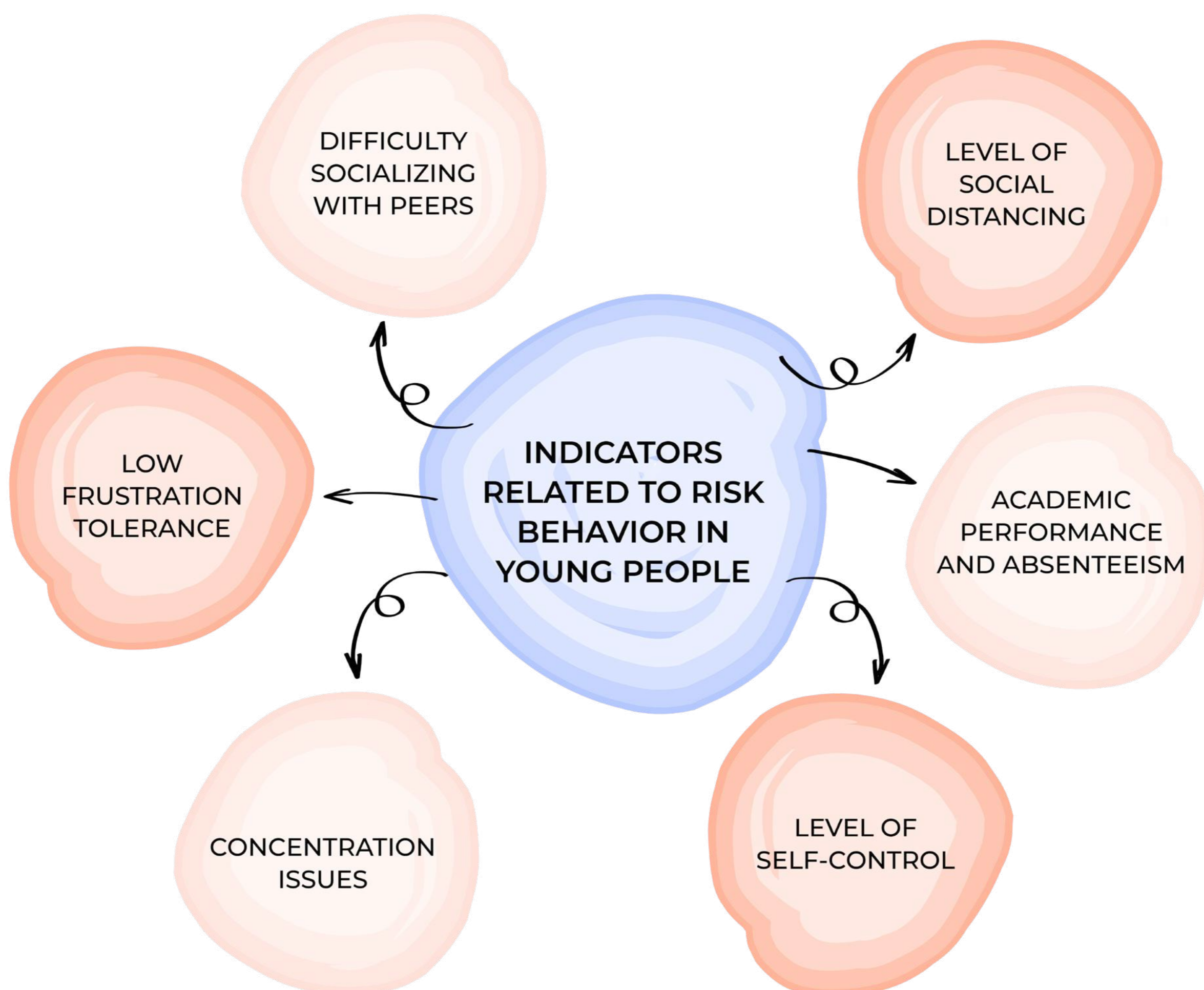


Figura 2: Indicators Related to Risk Behaviors in Young People

If we observe several of these signs or indicators repeatedly and over an extended period, it becomes extremely important to determine their cause, as they may be triggered by emotional or behavioral factors or disorders.

Early intervention is key to helping the adolescent develop healthy coping strategies.

Level of Social Isolation

Social isolation during adolescence and youth can have significant negative effects on a young person's emotional and mental development. Some warning signs that may indicate a young person is experiencing this difficulty include:

- Inactive or limited social life. The young person avoids making plans with friends and family, even those they previously enjoyed regularly;
- Spending excessive time at home, avoiding going out and interacting with others;
- Preference for solitary and individual activities;
- Excessive use of social media or digital devices;
- Difficulty interacting with new people or forming friendships;
- Withdrawing from close friends and family;
- Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and low self-esteem;
- Distrust or indifference toward others;
- Avoiding any kind of confrontation and lacking emotional self-regulation;
- School absenteeism, declining academic performance, and withdrawal from extracurricular activities;
- Neglect of personal hygiene and appearance;
- Reluctance to talk about their social life or emotions.

When several of these signs are observed, it is important to try to understand the root of the isolation and provide the young person with appropriate support in a non-judgmental, safe environment.

What to Do in Cases of Social Isolation:

- ▶ Invite them to participate in small group settings where they can feel safe and comfortable;
- ▶ Suggest tasks or activities that promote social interaction without overwhelming exposure;
- ▶ Acknowledge their efforts and achievements.

Academic Performance and School Absenteeism

Young people struggling with academic performance or school absenteeism may be facing emotional, social, or family related difficulties that impact their ability to function in this area.

For this reason, it's important to identify warning signs in order to intervene early and provide the necessary support:

- Disinterest, lack of enthusiasm, indifference, or negativity toward academic activities;
- Frequent absences without justification;
- Avoidance of school-related or extracurricular activities;
- Noticeable decline in academic performance;
- Submission of incomplete or low-quality assignments;
- Defiant attitudes toward teachers and classmates;
- Anxiety related to school tasks, assignments, or exams;
- Excessive self-criticism and fear of failure;
- Resistance to talking about their school day;
- Changes in study routines and habits.

When dealing with this type of situation, it is especially important to strengthen the student's self-esteem and motivation in order to prevent a negative cycle of failure, frustration, and demotivation that could lead to further academic decline.

To achieve this, it is essential to use encouraging language and to value effort more than results.

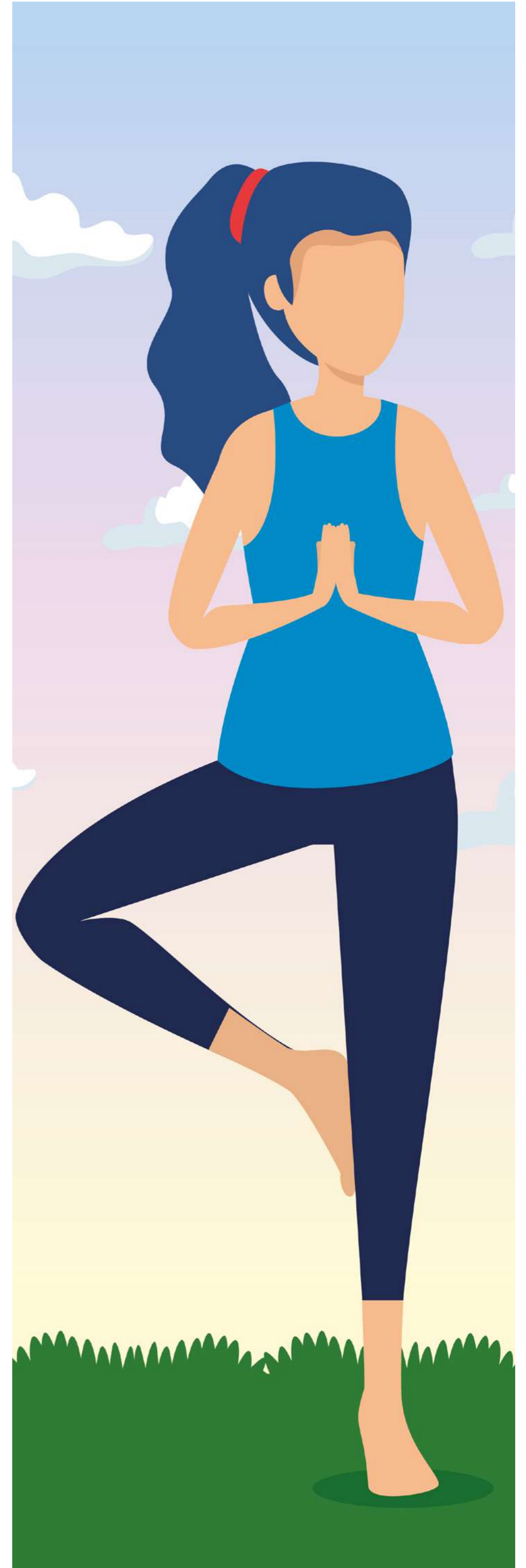
Self-Regulation and Impulse Control

Young people may display a range of behaviors and attitudes that reflect problems with self-control, impacting their ability to regulate emotions, impulses, and reactions in different situations.

Some signs of poor self-regulation include:

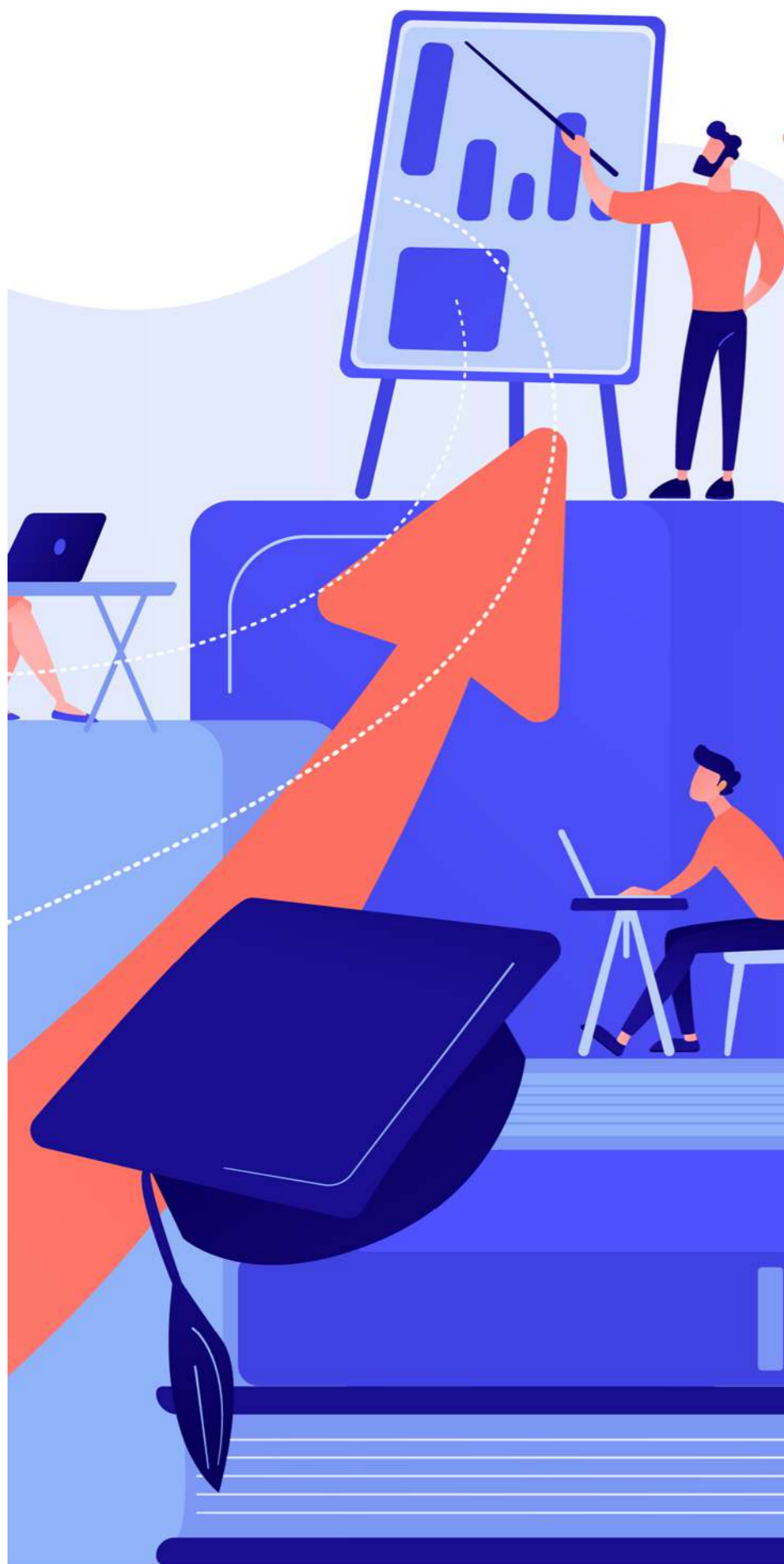
- Risky or impulsive decision-making without considering the consequences;
- Sudden mood swings, disproportionate reactions, impulsivity, or aggressiveness;
- Lack of awareness about the emotional impact their actions may have on others;
- Difficulty calming down or relaxing after a conflict;
- Frequently interrupting conversations;
- Repeated rule-breaking or disregard for established norms;
- Overreacting to discipline or frustration;
- Trouble forming and maintaining healthy social relationships;
- Substance use or dependency, or disordered eating habits;
- Struggles with academic responsibilities;
- Excessive procrastination and lack of perseverance;
- Tendency to make decisions based on immediate rewards.

When these behaviors are observed, it's essential to intervene using a collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, and professionals. The goal is to analyze the underlying causes and provide appropriate support, always from an understanding and educational—not punitive—perspective.



What to do when there are problems with self-regulation:

- ▶ Teach emotional regulation techniques (deep breathing, counting to ten before responding, etc.);
- ▶ Reframe negative thoughts;
- ▶ Use the “traffic light method”: a simple, visual technique that helps young people recognize and manage their emotions before acting impulsively.



Concentration issues in adolescents can have a significant impact on their academic, social, and emotional life. These problems may arise from factors such as stress, lack of motivation, or learning disorders.

Warning signs of concentration difficulties include:

- Trouble focusing on simple, everyday tasks;
- Frequently changing tasks or leaving them unfinished;
- Taking excessive time to complete simple assignments;
- Inability to multitask;
- Difficulty organizing and planning tasks;
- Struggling to follow instructions;
- Forgetting information and frequently losing personal items;
- Forgetting important details or losing focus during conversations;
- Restlessness, nervousness, impulsivity, and constant fidgeting;
- Disinterest in academic work;
- Avoidance of tasks that require significant mental effort;
- Low energy and lack of motivation;
- Excessive use of electronic devices.

It is important to understand that concentration problems are often influenced by emotional, environmental, biological, or habit-based factors—not just by a lack of willpower, as is commonly assumed.



What to do when there are concentration issues:

- ▶ Establish clear and consistent routines;
- ▶ Create task lists;
- ▶ Remove distractions from the environment.

Neglect of Physical Health

When young people begin to neglect their physical health, it can be a sign of underlying emotional, social, family, or stress related issues. For this reason, these behaviors should not be ignored.

Some signs that may indicate physical health neglect include:

- Extreme physical changes;
- Excessive use of filters or photo editing;
- Disrupted sense of time;
- Neglect of personal hygiene or their surroundings;
- Unkempt physical appearance;
- Abandonment of basic routines;
- Frequent physical complaints without medical cause;
- Disordered or extreme eating habits;
- Changes in sleep patterns;
- Decreased physical activity or time spent outdoors;
- Social and emotional isolation.



“

It's extremely important not to judge or mock the young person's situation, as this can reinforce the harmful behavior.

Low Frustration Tolerance

Low frustration tolerance can affect a young person's ability to handle situations that don't meet their expectations or that make them uncomfortable.

Some indicators that may suggest low frustration tolerance in youth include:

- Irritability, anger, or rage over minor setbacks, problems, or unmet expectations;
- Emotional outbursts over seemingly small issues;
- Rejection of limits, rules, or restrictions;
- Abandoning projects or avoiding tasks that cause frustration;
- Distrust toward authority figures;
- Feeling defeated when faced with mistakes;
- Overly defensive responses to criticism (even constructive feedback);
- Use of distractions to avoid problems;
- Excessive use of social media;
- Defeatist attitude when facing challenges;
- Withdrawal from social or group activities;
- Controlling and perfectionist behavior.

Low frustration tolerance is a common challenge during adolescence, but if left unaddressed, it can seriously impact academic performance, relationships, and emotional well-being.

Difficulty Socializing with Peers

This issue is increasingly common among young people today. Difficulty connecting and forming relationships with peers can lead to social isolation or anxiety.

Some signs of socialization difficulties include:

- Discomfort when interacting with peers;
- Avoidance of group activities or staying away from social situations;
- Fear and nervousness in social interactions;
- Trouble starting or continuing conversations;
- Lack of interest in others or giving inappropriate responses;
- Reluctance to open up and share thoughts, emotions, or feelings;
- Difficulty interpreting non-verbal cues;
- Excessive sensitivity to criticism or comments from others;
- Inability to resolve conflicts with peers;
- Preference for the company of adults.

“

Adolescence is a key stage for developing social skills, building group identity, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Therefore, when socialization issues arise, it's essential to respond with empathy and understanding.

”

 **What to do when there are socialization difficulties:**

- ▶ Teach and practice social skill;
- ▶ Promote healthy social opportunities;
- ▶ Organize group activities to encourage communication and break the ice;
- ▶ Use cooperative online games or social virtual games.

Self-Harm or Suicidal Ideation

Warning signs related to suicidal thoughts or behaviors in adolescents must be taken very seriously and identified as early as possible, as timely intervention can save lives.

These behaviors or thoughts are often the result of deeper emotional, psychological, or social issues.

Some warning signs that may indicate a young person is at risk include:

- Comments about death, whether direct or indirect;
- Talking frequently about suicide;
- Sudden social withdrawal;
- Hopelessness and loss of interest in the future;
- Self-harming behaviors;
- Substance abuse;
- Reckless or dangerous behavior;
- Emotional numbness, unexplained crying, or extreme anxiety;
- Saying unusual goodbyes to family or friends;
- Giving away personal or meaningful belongings;
- Feelings of guilt and very negative self-image;
- Unpredictable or unusual behavior.

If multiple indicators are present, it is critical to take every signal seriously and act immediately.
It is essential to listen without judgment, offer emotional support, and seek professional help.

If you know someone who needs help, or if that someone is you, don't hesitate!

Call



Suicide hotline
024 in Spain
1411 in Portugal

Warning Signs Related to the Misuse of Social Media

In this section, we'll explore some of the most common indicators that may alert us to the negative impact that the misuse of social media can have on young people.

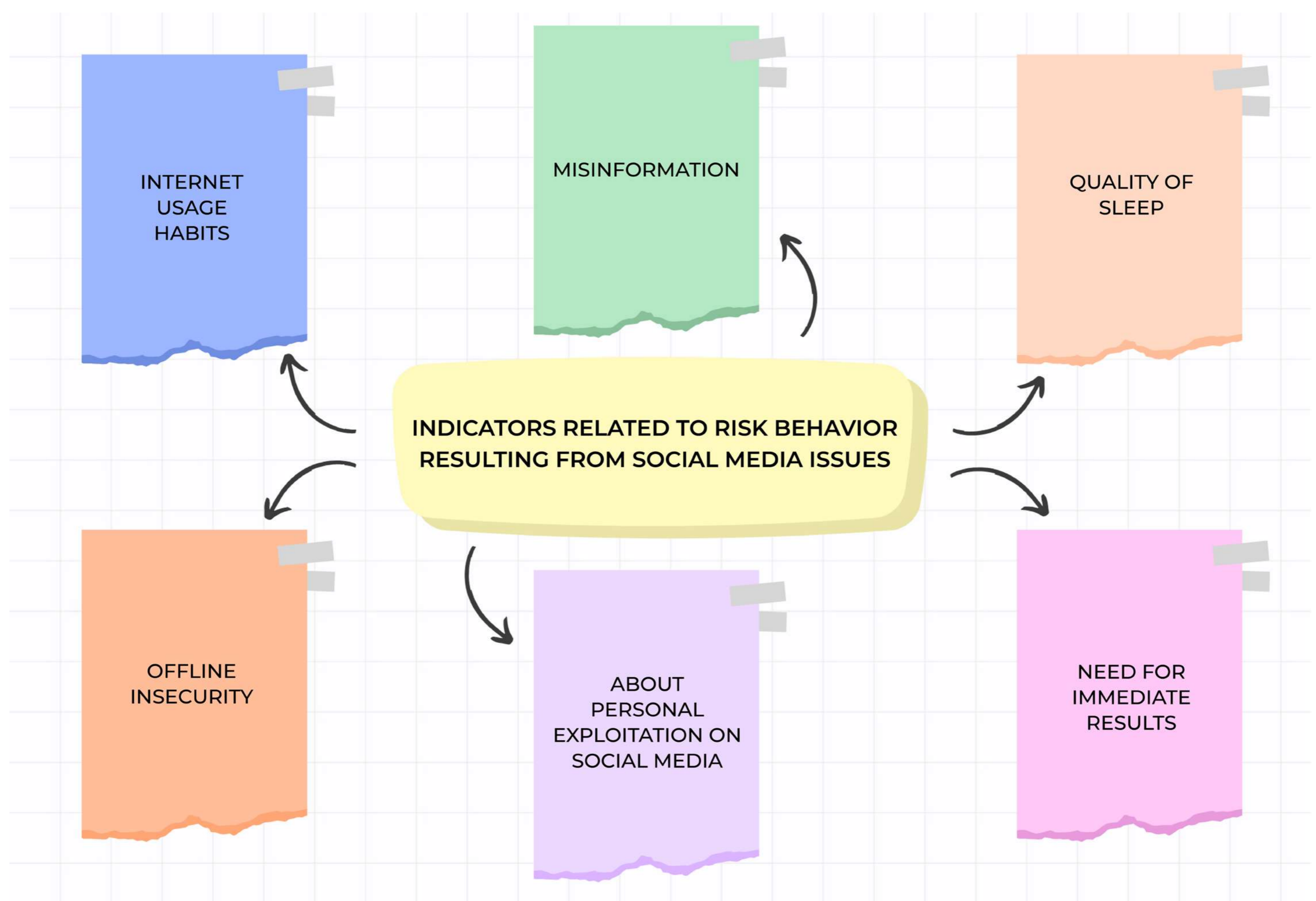


Figura 3: Indicators Related to Risk Behaviors Arising from Problems with Social Media

Internet Use Habits

Improper use of the internet can lead to the development of harmful habits that affect young people's physical, emotional, and social well-being.

Some warning signs related to unhealthy internet use include:

- Spending prolonged periods in front of screens, especially on non-educational or unproductive activities;
- Disinterest in "offline" activities;
- Preference for online socializing over face-to-face interactions;
- Disrupted daily routines caused by losing track of time online;
- Neglect of academic, family, or work responsibilities;
- Physical health issues such as sleep problems, fatigue, or exhaustion;
- Emotional well-being concerns such as mood swings or anxiety;
- Exposure to violent or inappropriate content, or interactions with strangers;
- Lack of limits on both time spent online and the type of content consumed;
- Changes in eating habits;
- Decline in academic performance.



When internet use habits become problematic, it's essential to take action. However, it's also important to acknowledge that technology is a natural part of adolescent life. The goal isn't to prohibit, but to guide and educate.

Misinformation

Misinformation on social media can greatly impact young people, as they are frequently exposed to content that is not always truthful or well-founded. When youth engage with false or misleading information, it can negatively influence their decisions, perceptions, and social relationships.

Some warning signs that may indicate a problem with misinformation include:

- Sudden shifts in beliefs and attitudes. Young people may fall into conspiracy theories or extreme, unrealistic ideologies, and even become skeptical of trustworthy sources;
- Sharing false information or clearly manipulated content;
- Difficulty distinguishing between facts and opinions;
- Resistance to verifying information or learning how to identify reliable sources;
- Adopting extreme stances on social, political, or economic issues, expressing hate toward other ideologies, or joining extremist or closed-minded groups;
- Rejection of people, friends, or family members with differing opinions;
- Emotional and psychological distress. This may include irrational fears or anxieties, hopelessness, or disillusionment about the future;

Nowadays, much of what young people learn happens outside the classroom.



Therefore, it's important to act through education rather than censorship.

The goal is not just to correct what they believe, but to teach them how to think more critically.

What to do when misinformation is detected:

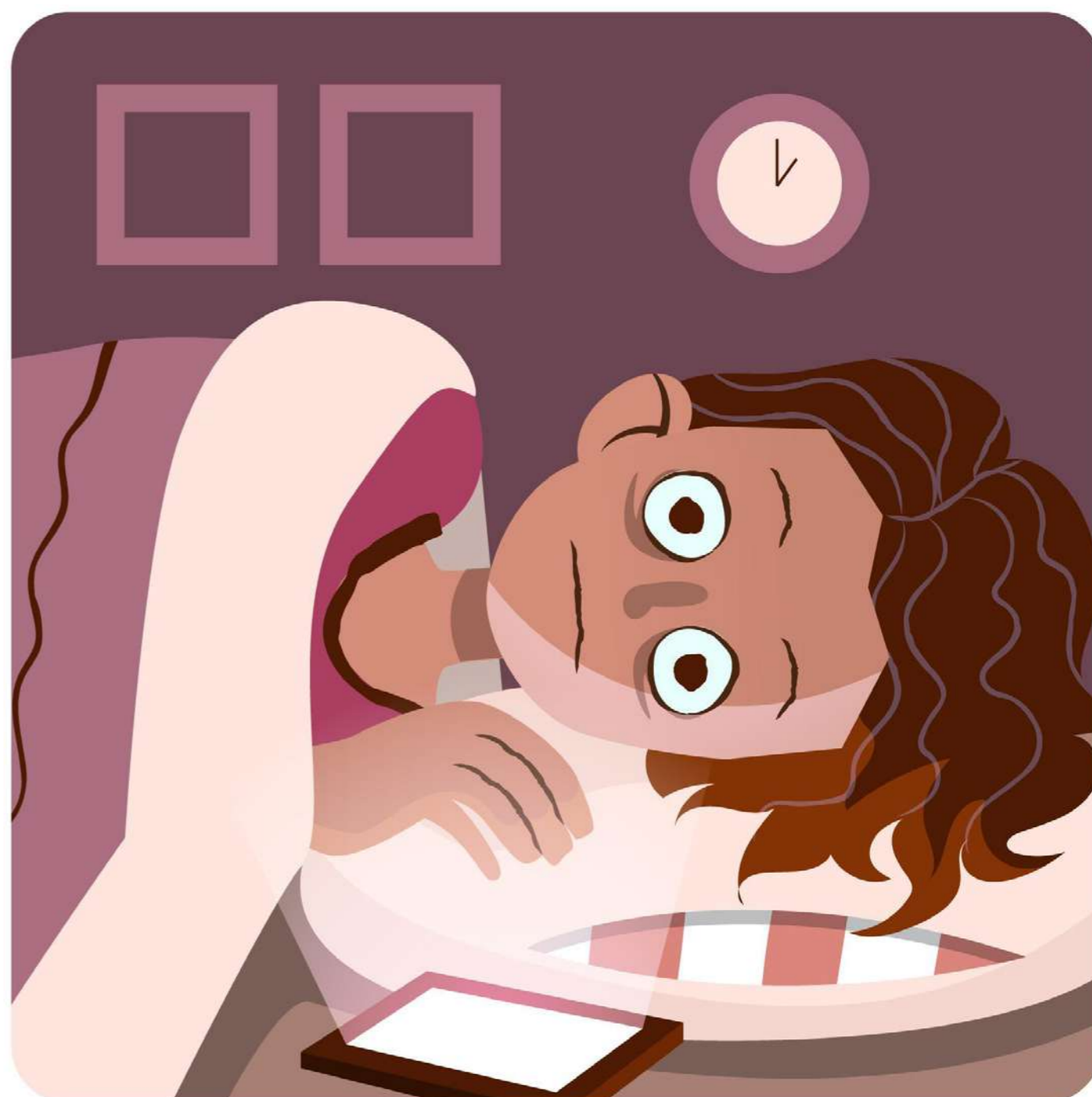
- ▶ Identify misinformation without ridicule;
- ▶ Promote media literacy education;
- ▶ Encourage critical thinking.

Sleep Duration and Quality

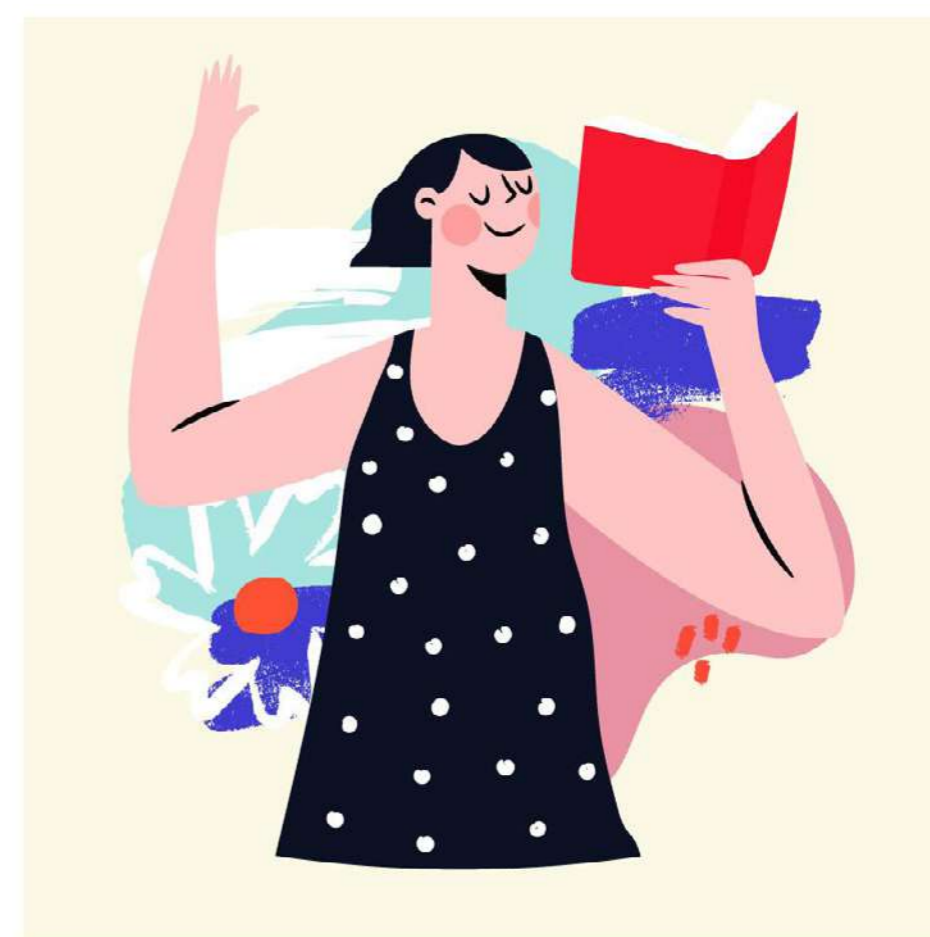
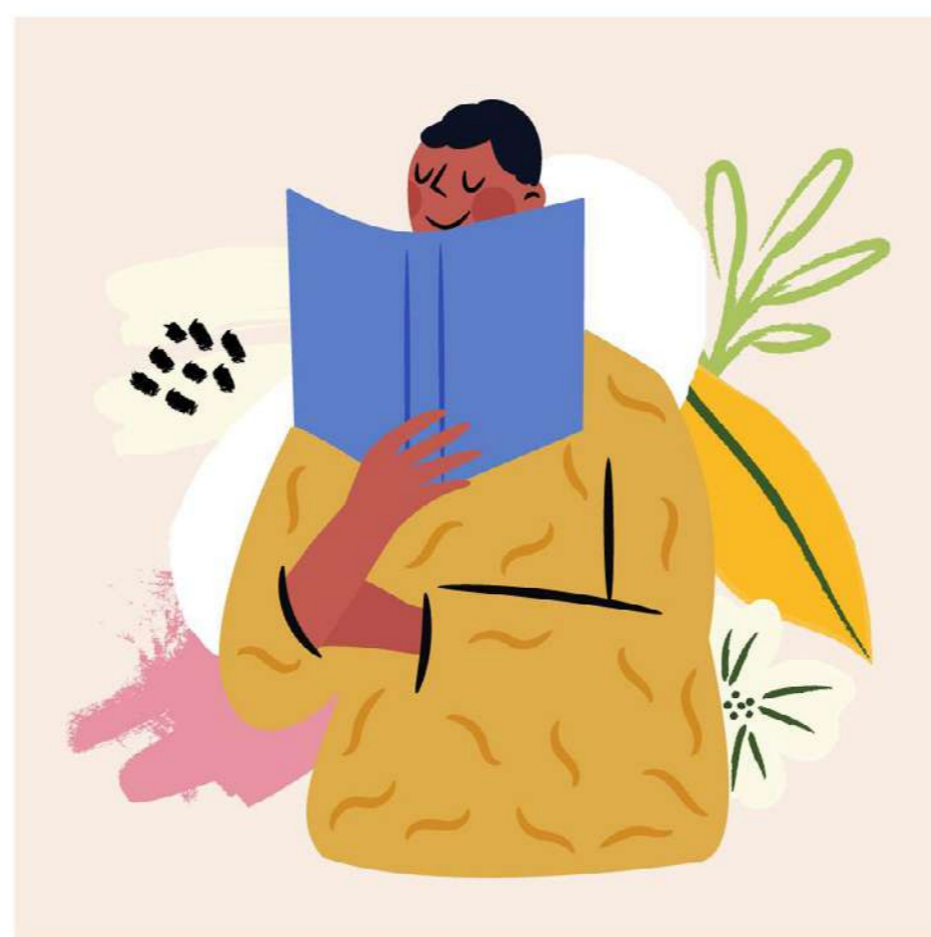
Digital content consumption and social media use during rest hours can severely disrupt sleep patterns and quality.

Some warning signs that may indicate sleep disturbances in young people include:

- Difficulty falling asleep or insomnia. The light emitted by digital devices interferes with melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep;
- Anxiety or stress caused by not checking social media, seeing upsetting content, or experiencing social pressure;
- Interrupted sleep, often caused by the mental overload from continuous online stimulation;
- Constant tiredness or daytime sleepiness;
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Altered sleep schedules, such as going to bed much later than usual or significantly reducing total sleep hours;
- Overuse of the phone as a tool to relax before bed;
- Trouble waking up in the morning.



It is very important for young people to understand that sleep quality is essential to their physical and emotional health, and that balancing social media use is key.



What to do when sleep-related problems are identified:

- ▶ Approach the issue with care, not blame;
- ▶ Establish a regular sleep routine;
- ▶ Suggest alternatives to late-night scrolling;
- ▶ Encourage relaxing bedtime rituals.

Need for Immediate Results

The need to obtain immediate results is an increasingly common trait among young people due to the way digital platforms are designed to deliver fast rewards and instant responses. This can lead to behavioral patterns that negatively impact their development.

Some warning signs that may be related to this issue include:

01

Impatience or irritability when responses are not immediate, whether on social media or in offline life.

02

Impulsive and constant posting of content without considering the consequences.

03

Abandoning or showing disinterest in activities that don't provide immediate results.

 **What to do when signs of a need for instant gratification are detected:**

- ▶ Practice frustration tolerance through exercises involving long turns, waiting times, or multi-step tasks;
- ▶ Break long tasks into smaller, manageable steps;
- ▶ Reduce exposure to instant gratification stimuli.

Personal Overexposure on Social Media

It is increasingly common for young people to feel the need to constantly share aspects of their personal lives in order to gain attention, validation, and approval.

It's important to be aware of certain behaviors that may indicate that a young person is oversharing their private life:

- Constantly posting private details.
- Sharing sensitive content or negative aspects of their life.
- Displaying emotions and personal conflicts publicly.
- Continuously seeking others' approval and constant interaction.
- Distorting reality in their posts—projecting an image of perfection.
- Frequently comparing themselves to others.
- Using social media as a reflection of their identity.
- Sharing self-destructive behaviors.
- Showing little concern for the risks involved in sharing highly intimate details.

ATTENTION!

Overexposure can compromise their safety, privacy, and emotional well-being, and young people often do not fully understand the consequences this may entail.

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO CONTINUE?

YES, I'M SURE.

NO WAY

Offline Insecurity

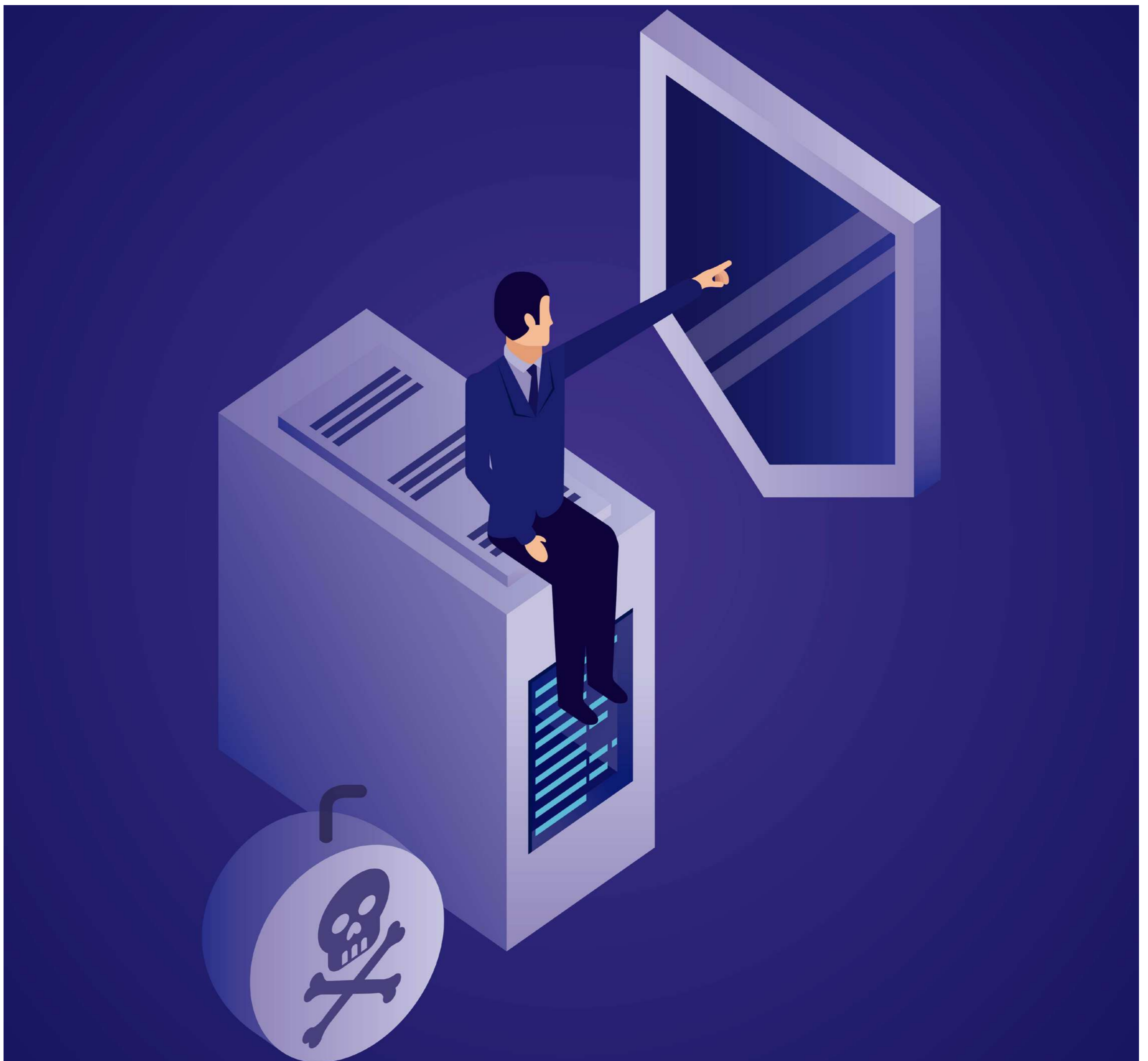
Offline insecurity refers to the lack of confidence or emotional discomfort that a young person may experience in everyday situations outside the digital world.

Warning signs that may indicate offline insecurity include:

- Anxiety or fear in social situations;
- Withdrawal from friends and family;
- Reluctance to leave the house or go to places they used to enjoy.

💡 What to do when signs of offline insecurity are detected:

- ▶ Address these difficulties with empathy and without judgment;
- ▶ Practice social skills in safe, low-pressure environments;
- ▶ Teach emotional regulation techniques such as positive visualization and cognitive reframing.



06

**BEYOND THE SCROLL:
THE BRIGHT SIDE OF BEING CONNECTED**

The way we communicate, learn, and build relationships with others. What began as simple entertainment tools have evolved into multifunctional platforms that influence education, employment, activism, and personal identity. However, their impact largely depends on how we use them. Responsible and strategic use can open the door to incredible opportunities, while excessive or inappropriate use can lead to negative consequences.

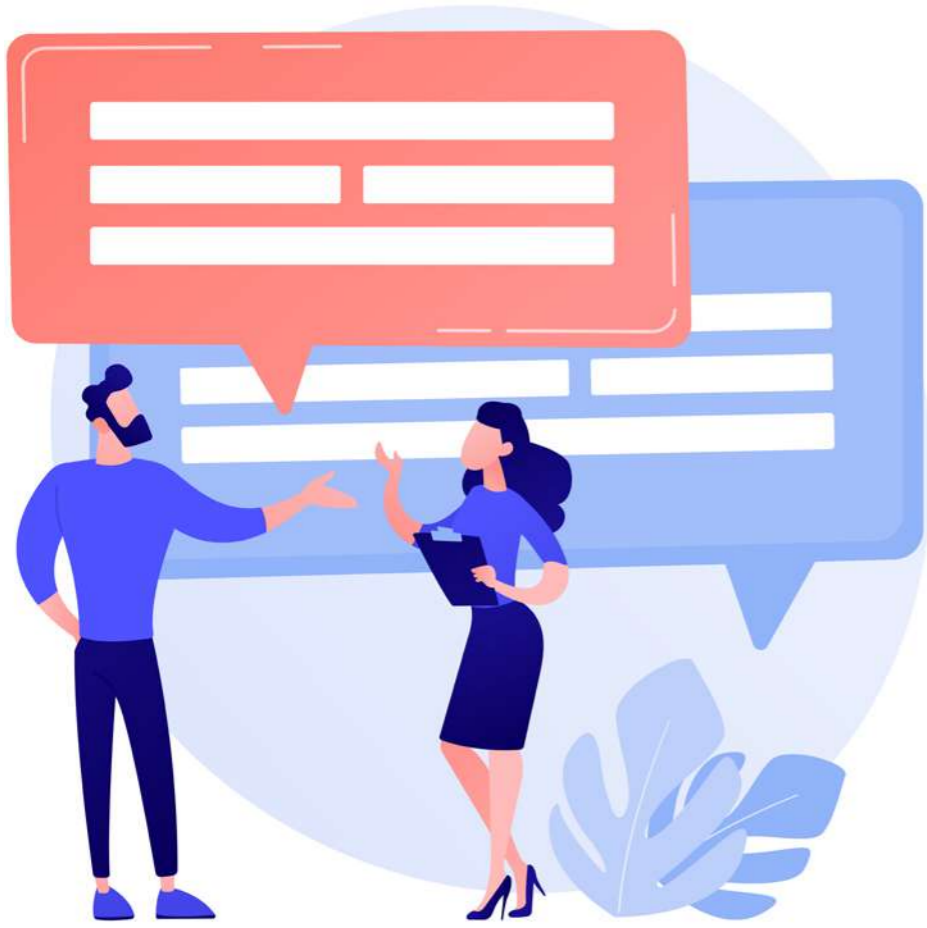


For young people, social media represents a key space in their daily lives. It allows them to connect with friends and family, share experiences, learn new skills, express themselves creatively, and even build a professional career. Yet, access to vast amounts of information and the immediacy of interactions can be a double-edged sword if not used mindfully. Overexposure, misinformation, and digital dependency are some of the risks that emerge when there is no conscious control over its use.

It is essential to foster a culture of balanced and critical use of social media. Rather than demonizing or banning these platforms, we must teach young people to harness their positive potential by promoting a sense of digital responsibility. Learning to identify reliable sources of news, manage online privacy, avoid excessive content consumption, and develop digital skills are some of the key elements for healthy social media use.



Below, we explore some of the greatest benefits that social media can offer when used intelligently and with purpose:



Social media has broken down geographical barriers, allowing people to stay connected regardless of distance. Families separated across countries can stay up to date with each other's lives, friends can communicate in real time, and young people can find support communities with shared interests anywhere in the world.

In addition, these platforms have revolutionized how we interact, enabling not only personal but also professional and academic communication. Nowadays, young people can join virtual conferences, attend live talks with experts from various fields, and even collaborate on international projects without leaving home. This interconnectedness has opened up unprecedented opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual learning.

For professionals working with youth, these tools can be essential in building trust and connecting more effectively within their digital environments. The presence of educators, psychologists, and counselors on social media can help create safe spaces where young people feel comfortable expressing concerns and receiving support.

Example

A student moving abroad can stay connected with family and friends through video calls, instant messaging, or social media posts, helping them avoid feelings of isolation.

Another case

A young person with a rare disease can find support communities on Facebook or Reddit made up of others facing similar challenges, which contributes to their emotional and social well-being.

Tip for professionals

Explore tools like Instagram, TikTok, or Discord to interact more closely with young people and build trust. Use social media to share educational resources, open discussions on relevant topics, and promote healthy conversations about emotional well-being.



Far from being merely a source of entertainment, social media can be an endless source of knowledge. Platforms like YouTube, LinkedIn, TikTok, and even Twitter/X have democratized access to information, allowing anyone to learn about virtually any subject from the comfort of their own home.

Social media has made learning more accessible and flexible. There's no longer a need to enroll in expensive courses or attend institutions in person to acquire new skills. Today, young people all over the world can learn everything from programming and graphic design to soft skills like leadership and effective communication simply by following educational accounts and engaging in online communities.

Another case

A student struggling with math in school might find clear, dynamic explanations that reinforce their learning.

In addition to self-directed learning, social media encourages collaboration and teamwork. Platforms like Google Drive, Trello, and Notion have made remote education and group work easier, allowing students from different parts of the world to collaborate on projects in real time.

Reflection

Social media has transformed education into an accessible, interactive, and personalized experience. However, it's important that young people learn to evaluate the accuracy of the information they consume and develop critical thinking skills to distinguish quality content from misinformation.



Examples

LinkedIn Learning and Coursera: Platforms that allow young people to take free courses and earn certifications in key labor market areas.

Academic Twitter/X: Professionals and experts share articles, research, and discussions on global issues.

Example

A young person interested in programming can learn Python through YouTube, follow developers on Twitter/X, and join Discord communities to ask questions and improve their skills. This allows them to prepare for a tech career without formal education in the field.

Tip for students and educators

Supplement social media learning with trusted academic sources. Always fact-check content and make sure it comes from experts in the field. Participate in educational communities that encourage debate and the exchange of ideas.

Creativity and Personal Expression

Social media has opened immense doors for creativity and self-expression. Young artists, writers, designers, and content creators have found in these platforms a way to showcase their work, receive feedback, and build a global audience.

One of the greatest benefits of social media is the ability to share ideas without barriers. In the past, artists and creators needed intermediaries such as publishers, art galleries, or record labels to get their work seen. Today, a talented young person can reach thousands or even millions of people without relying on these institutions.

Moreover, the viral nature of content allows creativity to spread quickly and organically. A video, illustration, or song can go viral and reach global audiences within hours. Many young people have leveraged social media as a launchpad for their careers thanks to this exposure.


Example


A teenager who draws comics can post their artwork on Instagram or Behance and attract the attention of publishers or companies seeking emerging talent. The same goes for musicians uploading their work to YouTube or TikTok and catching the eye of producers or record labels.


Real case


Artists like Justin Bieber and Billie Eilish launched their careers by sharing videos on social media before being discovered by the music industry. Their starting platforms were YouTube and SoundCloud, where millions accessed their music without major advertising investments.

Useful tools

 **Canva:** Allows users to create visually appealing content, ideal for Instagram and Pinterest.

 **CapCut:** Enables easy yet professional video editing, essential for TikTok and YouTube creators.

 **GarageBand:** A key tool for music production and sound experimentation, used by many emerging artists.

 **Behance y Dribbble:** Ideal platforms for graphic designers, photographers, and illustrators to professionally showcase their work.

Reflection

Creativity finds a limitless space on social media. What's essential is that young people learn to use it to enhance their talents—without falling into the trap of metrics or seeking external validation through 'likes'.

Tip

Posting consistently and maintaining a coherent visual identity on social media increases visibility and impact for creative content.



Social media has transformed the way companies seek talent and how professionals build their personal brand. Nowadays, recruiters don't just search for candidates on traditional platforms like LinkedIn, but also explore networks like Instagram, TikTok, and even Twitter/X to find standout profiles in various fields.

Example

A graphic design student can share their portfolio on Behance and catch the eye of international companies, securing remote job opportunities. Similarly, a programmer who actively participates on GitHub and publishes innovative projects may be contacted by tech firms looking for new talent.

Another case

A TikTok content creator who shares financial advice and promotes economic education may be hired by an investment company to produce educational content for its target audience.

Reflection

Social media has democratized access to job opportunities. The key is learning to build an authentic and professional personal brand, avoiding content that could negatively impact your reputation in the future. Your digital reputation is crucial in today's hyperconnected world.

Advice for young people


Keep a professional profile on LinkedIn, share achievements and personal projects, and participate in digital communities that promote networking and skills development. It's also a good idea to optimize social media profiles to reflect professionalism and dedication to your field.

Digital networking is one of the keys to professional success today. Young people who manage to stand out on social media can access job opportunities even before completing their studies or without any formal prior experience. Many companies value creativity, a commitment to learning, and strong communication skills as demonstrated through social media profiles.

Key platforms for job opportunities

 **LinkedIn:** The main professional network to connect with employers and professionals in your sector.

 **Behance y Dribbble:** Perfect for graphic designers, illustrators, and visual artists.

 **GitHub:** Essential for programmers and software developers to showcase code and projects.

 **TikTok e Instagram:** Increasingly used by companies looking for content creators with skills in digital marketing and communication.

Activism and Social Change

Social media has proven to be a key tool for social mobilization and activism, allowing important causes to go global within hours. Thanks to their immediacy, interactivity, and massive reach, digital platforms have become the stage for significant social change, driving everything from awareness-raising to legislative reforms in various countries.

One of the most impactful aspects of digital activism is that anyone—regardless of location or resources—can participate and make a difference. Movements that once took years to gain attention can now garner support within days, achieving real societal change. Social media enables protest organization, digital petition campaigns, information dissemination on human rights violations, and direct pressure on governments and corporations to address social issues.

In addition, social networks facilitate international cooperation around shared causes. Activists from different countries can connect, share strategies, and amplify their messages in ways previously unimaginable. This has helped turn local issues into global concerns, fostering solidarity and joint action.





Example 1

#MeToo and the fight against sexual harassment

The #MeToo movement, born in 2006 and popularized globally in 2017, became a milestone in the fight against harassment and sexual abuse. Millions of survivors shared their stories on Twitter/X and Instagram, which led to legal and social consequences for major figures in entertainment, politics, and sports. As a result, laws in many countries were strengthened to better protect victims and more harshly penalize harassment.

Example 2

#BlackLivesMatter and the fight against racism

The #BlackLivesMatter movement began in 2013 but reached its peak in 2020 following the death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in the U.S. Through social media, millions of people around the world came together to demand justice and police reform. The public pressure led to trials, firings of involved officers, and a widespread reckoning with structural racism in many countries.





Example 3

#FridaysForFuture and the climate movement

Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish activist, started the #FridaysForFuture movement in 2018 by skipping school to protest outside the Swedish Parliament about the climate crisis. Her action inspired millions of young people globally, who began organizing school strikes and climate protests through social media. This movement pushed governments and companies to rethink their environmental policies, bringing the climate crisis to the global agenda.

Example 4

Digital rights movement in Europe

In Europe, digital activism has played a crucial role in protecting online privacy and digital rights. Activists and organizations used social media to pressure governments and the European Union to implement laws like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), now a global benchmark for personal data protection. They have also fought against mass surveillance and data abuse by tech giants.



Reflection

Social media has shown that digital activism can change policies, raise awareness, and mobilize millions around the world. However, it is essential for users to think critically and verify information before sharing, to avoid falling for disinformation or manipulation.

Advice

If you want to support a cause on social media, be sure to thoroughly research the issue, share credible sources, and combine online activism with real-world participation. Together, digital and offline activism can create truly meaningful change.

Social media allows users to project their image to the world, becoming a digital reflection of their values, interests, and aspirations. For young people, their digital identity can significantly influence academic, professional, and personal opportunities. How they present themselves online can open doors—or close them—if their digital presence is not well managed.

Digital identity isn't just based on what someone posts, but also on what others post about them. Comments, tagged photos, interactions, and even the posts a user "likes" all contribute to shaping their online persona. This is why it's essential for young people to understand that their digital footprint is permanent and that anything they share online could be seen and judged by future employers, academic institutions, collaborators, or partners.

Example

A student applying to a university can use social media to show their interest in a particular field by sharing academic achievements, research projects, participation in events or conferences, and content related to their area of study. This builds a digital identity aligned with their professional goals, which can set them apart during the selection process.

That said, building a healthy digital identity isn't just about showcasing a positive image—it's also about protecting privacy and online safety. Many platforms collect personal data for various purposes, so it's crucial to understand privacy settings and make informed decisions about what to share and with whom.

Final Reflection

Social media can be a powerful ally when used intelligently and in moderation. Instead of seeing it only as a risk, we should embrace it as a tool for personal and professional growth. Building a healthy digital identity means being mindful of what we post, how we interact, and how this shapes our future. In an increasingly digital world, managing our online presence is a vital life skill.

Advice

Teach young people the importance of online privacy, how to configure safety settings on social platforms, and how to manage their digital footprint. Key tips include:

- Regularly review privacy settings and adjust them to control who can view posts and personal information;
- Think before posting—avoid sharing sensitive content or compromising images that could damage one's reputation;
- Monitor your digital footprint by searching your name online to see what information is publicly accessible;
- Separate personal and professional life—consider creating distinct profiles for each if necessary;
- Avoid engaging in hate speech or negative content, as social media activity can be used to evaluate a person's character and behavior.

Access to Information and Unlimited Learning

Social media has democratized access to information, allowing anyone to learn about an endless array of topics for free and at any time. Unlike traditional education, which is often limited by resources, location, or financial barriers, social media has opened up a world of possibilities for self-directed and continuous learning.

Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Twitter/X, Reddit, and LinkedIn offer educational content in multiple formats—from interactive tutorials and live conferences to academic debates and study groups. The ease with which young people can access this type of information has changed the way we consume knowledge, making learning a more dynamic and inclusive process.

One of the most outstanding benefits is that students can learn at their own pace and dive into topics that are not typically covered in traditional school curricula. Moreover, educational content creators have succeeded in making complex subjects more accessible through visual, interactive, and entertaining explanations, which better capture the attention of young audiences.


Real example


A young person passionate about astronomy can follow science communicators like Neil deGrasse Tyson or official NASA accounts on Twitter/X and Instagram, gaining access to news, research, and live events. This not only broadens their knowledge but also connects them with experts and global communities.


Another positive aspect of social media in education is the ability to interact with experts and professionals in each user's area of interest. Participating in live webinars, asking questions in virtual conferences, or following scientific debates on platforms like Twitter/X allows students to engage in global conversations and learn directly from leaders in the field.


Moreover, many universities and educational institutions have embraced the use of social media to share resources and provide academic support to their students. In some cases, communities have formed on platforms like Discord or Facebook where students can organize virtual study sessions, receive guidance from tutors, and exchange educational materials.

Examples of educational platforms on social media

 **YouTube:** Thousands of educational channels offer classes in math, programming, history, philosophy, and applied sciences.

 **Educational TikTok:** Accounts like @unprofecontiktok or @scienceexplainers break down complex concepts in short, engaging videos.

 **Reddit:** Forums where users exchange knowledge, solve questions, and debate across a wide range of subjects.

 **LinkedIn Learning and Coursera:** Platforms that offer free courses and certifications that can strengthen both academic and professional profiles.

Reflection

For young people, these platforms can serve as an open and complementary classroom to their formal education. However, it's crucial for them to learn how to discern between verified information and misinformation, developing critical thinking skills that help them filter high-quality content.



Tip

Always cross-check information with official sources, verify the credibility of content creators, and use social media strategically to enhance learning. Turning them into an educational tool rather than just a source of entertainment is key to unlocking their full potential.

In a world where information is just a click away, the real challenge is not finding content—but learning how to identify what is truly valuable and how to use it for personal and professional growth. By using social media consciously, young people can access unlimited, personalized learning aligned with their interests.

When used with purpose and responsibility, social media can become an incredibly useful tool for education, personal development, creativity, and activism. Understanding its potential and knowing how to use it properly is key to maximizing its benefits and minimizing its risks. Let's make the most of it with intelligence and balance!

07

**TOOLS AND RESOURCES
FOR YOUTH WORKERS**

Nowadays, social media and digital tools have radically transformed the way young people interact with the world. For professionals working with them—such as educators, counselors, psychologists, and social workers—it is essential to have the right strategies and resources to guide youth toward a healthy and meaningful use of these platforms. The goal is not only to warn about the dangers of the internet, but also to provide tools that help young people build a balanced and productive relationship with the digital world.

This chapter is designed to offer a comprehensive guide to the best available tools for supporting professionals in their work. It includes platforms for managing and analyzing social media, resources for digital literacy, educational content creation tools, apps for digital well-being, and systems to assess the impact of social media use on youth. In addition, it presents strategies to combat misinformation and foster critical thinking in the digital environment.

In the following sections, professionals will find detailed information about:

- 01 Social media management tools**, which allow professionals to schedule posts, analyze engagement, and measure the impact of educational campaigns
- 02 Digital literacy and online safety tools**, essential for helping young people protect their privacy and identify risks such as *cyberbullying* and data overexposure.
- 03 Online education and learning platforms**, which provide high-quality academic content accessible to all users.
- 04 Digital content creation tools**, which are key for both young people and professionals to develop engaging and dynamic educational materials.
- 05 Tools to evaluate the impact of social media on youth**, crucial for designing intervention strategies and understanding the emotional and social effects of digital engagement.
- 06 Digital well-being and time management apps**, which help users maintain healthy habits and avoid digital addiction.
- 07 Mentoring and emotional support platforms**, resources that foster emotional well-being and youth guidance.
- 08 Resources to combat misinformation and fake news**, aimed at developing critical thinking and giving young people the ability to distinguish between real information and misleading content.

At the end of the chapter, you'll find recommendations for applying these resources when working with young people, along with strategies to integrate these tools in educational, therapeutic, and community settings. This way, professionals will be able to maximize the positive impact of social media and turn it into a powerful educational and awareness-raising tool.


01


Social Media Management Tools


The use of social media has not only become a fundamental part of modern communication but also a key resource for education and awareness-raising. For professionals working with young people, effectively managing these platforms is crucial to maximize their positive impact. Proper planning and content analysis can make the difference between an effective strategy and poor management that fails to engage youth.


Social media management tools allow users to schedule posts, measure audience engagement, analyze content reach, and monitor online conversations around specific topics. This is especially useful for educators, psychologists, and counselors who want to share valuable information in a structured and efficient way.

Key tools

 **Hootsuite** – Allows users to schedule posts across multiple platforms, monitor activity, and generate performance reports.

 **Buffer** – Similar to Hootsuite, but with a more intuitive and user-friendly interface, focused on platforms like Twitter/X and Instagram.

 **Meta Business Suite** – An ideal solution for managing Facebook and Instagram from a single dashboard, streamlining content administration and audience interaction.

 **Later** – A visual planning tool that enables previewing posts on Instagram and TikTok before publishing.

Application when working with young people

For professionals who want to use social media as an educational and awareness channel, these tools can be extremely helpful. A school counselor, for example, can schedule a series of posts on digital safety, mental health, or *cyberbullying* using Hootsuite or Buffer, ensuring a consistent flow of information without needing to post manually every day.

A practical example would be a youth organization working with teens to prevent online bullying. Using Meta Business Suite, they can plan a full awareness campaign that includes educational videos, personal testimonies from affected youth, and digital safety resources. By

scheduling posts in advance, they can dedicate more time to real-time engagement and responding to questions from young people.

Tips for effective use

01 Plan a content strategy

Define in advance the type of information to be shared, ensuring it's relevant and youth-friendly.

02 Use appealing visual content

Incorporate images, short videos, and infographics to make messages more dynamic.

03 Monitor engagement

Respond to questions, clarify doubts, and spark dialogue with young people to promote active participation.

04 Analyze data

Use the metrics provided by these tools to adjust communication strategies and enhance impact.

! Conclusion


Social media management tools not only optimize content administration but also allow for more effective communication with young people. Strategic use facilitates the delivery of key messages around digital safety, emotional well-being, and online education. By integrating these tools into their work, professionals can make the most of social media's potential and turn it into a positive space for learning and guidance for the new generations.


02


Tools for Digital Literacy and Online Safety


In today's world, where young people spend more and more time online, digital literacy has become an essential skill for their personal and professional development. The ability to distinguish between factual information and misinformation, understand the risks of overexposure, and know how to protect one's digital privacy are critical competencies that all youth should acquire. Therefore, professionals working with young people must have access to effective tools to guide them in these key areas.


Essential tools include

 **Be Internet Awesome (Google)** – An educational program created by Google that teaches children and teens about privacy, security, and digital citizenship through interactive games and educational activities.

 **Common Sense Media** – A platform offering guides and educational materials about social media, privacy, and critical thinking for teachers and families.

 **EU Kids Online** – A European research project that studies the impact of the internet on minors and provides evidence-based recommendations for safe online use.

 **Cyberbullying Research Center** – Resources designed to understand, prevent, and address *cyberbullying*, with tools aimed at both youth and professionals.

 **Qustodio** – Parental control software that allows users to monitor internet usage, set screen time limits, and protect minors from inappropriate content.

Application when working with young people

These tools can be integrated into educational programs and digital awareness workshops. For example, a secondary school teacher could use Be Internet Awesome to develop interactive classroom activities that teach students about the importance of secure passwords and online privacy. Meanwhile, a school counselor might rely on Common Sense Media to deliver informative sessions for parents and teens on screen time and digital well-being.

Tips for effective use

01 Integrate digital literacy into the school curriculum

From primary through higher education, students should receive training on cybersecurity and critical thinking in digital spaces.

02 Organize practical workshops

Use tools like Qustodio to help youth learn how to manage their screen time and avoid overexposure.

03 Encourage critical reflection on consumed content

Promote the analysis of social media content so that young people learn to distinguish reliable sources from misinformation.

04 Promote online safety at home and school

Collaborate with families and educational communities to strengthen the protection of minors in the digital environment.

! Conclusion

Digital literacy is a shared responsibility among educators, families, and youth professionals. With the right tools, young people can learn to manage their digital identity, safeguard their privacy, and develop the critical thinking skills needed to benefit from the digital world while avoiding its risks. Integrating these resources into everyday work with youth will contribute to creating a safer and more enriching online environment.


03


Online Learning and Educational Platforms


Social media and digital platforms have revolutionized access to education, enabling anyone with an internet connection to learn about an infinite variety of topics. For professionals working with young people, knowing how to use these platforms is essential to guide the new generations toward autonomous learning and improved digital skills.


In a world where information is just one click away, it's crucial for young people to learn how to use these resources effectively. It's not just about consuming content, but about developing critical thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to apply acquired knowledge.

Key platforms include

 **Khan Academy** – Offers free courses in math, science, history, economics, and many other areas. Its structure allows students to progress at their own pace with educational videos and interactive exercises.

 **Coursera y edX** – Higher education platforms offering courses from prestigious universities, with free options and paid certificates in areas such as social media, digital marketing, and programming.

 **YouTube Educativo** – Channels hosted by science communicators, historians, and experts who explain complex topics in accessible ways.

 **TikTok Educativo** – Although often associated with entertainment, more and more educators and professionals are using TikTok to share short, informative videos on a wide range of topics.

Application when working with young people

Professionals can incorporate these platforms in many ways. A teacher, for instance, can recommend specific Khan Academy videos to reinforce classroom topics, while an academic advisor can help students find Coursera or edX courses to complement their education.

A successful use case of these platforms was seen in under-resourced communities, where teachers used YouTube and Khan Academy to support students with limited access to textbooks. This allowed youth who couldn't afford private tutoring to access quality content and improve their academic performance.

Tips for effective use

01 Integrate digital resources into traditional teaching

Complement in-person lessons with videos, discussion forums, and interactive online activities.

02 Encourage self-directed learning

Teach young people how to find high-quality courses and build independent study habits.

03 Combine platforms

Alternate between different formats such as videos, podcasts, and articles to make learning more engaging.

04 Create learning communities

Use social media and forums to promote debate and exchange of ideas on educational topics.

! Conclusion

Online learning platforms have democratized access to knowledge and provide an unprecedented opportunity for young people to expand their skills and understanding. It is up to professionals to guide youth in the use of these tools, helping them filter quality content and make the most of the opportunities these platforms offer for academic and professional growth.


04


Tools for Creating Digital Content


Digital content is one of the most effective forms of communication today. For young people, creating content on social media is not only a form of self-expression but also an opportunity to develop creative skills, improve communication, and acquire essential digital competencies for their academic and professional futures. In this context, professionals working with youth must be familiar with tools that support the creation of educational, engaging, and high-quality content.


Teaching young people to produce positive, educational, and creative content empowers them to use social media in a meaningful way. Learning to design compelling visuals, edit videos, or structure ideas into digital presentations strengthens their ability to communicate effectively and share knowledge with a broader audience.


Key tools include

 **Canva** – An intuitive graphic design platform that allows users to create infographics, posters, presentations, and visually appealing social media content.

 **CapCut** – A free video editing app with advanced features for producing dynamic, professional content for TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

 **Adobe Spark** – A simple tool for creating graphics, animated videos, and interactive presentations without advanced technical skills.

 **Genially** – A platform for creating interactive content such as animated presentations, infographics, and mind maps.

 **Notion and Trello** – Project management and organization apps that help plan content and coordinate digital production tasks.

Application when working with young people

These tools can be used in educational activities, awareness campaigns, and collaborative projects. A teacher might assign a project in which students present their ideas using Canva infographics or explanatory videos edited with CapCut. Likewise, a social worker could use Genially to develop interactive presentations on topics such as *cyberbullying* prevention or digital education.

A strong example of the effective use of these tools comes from youth organizations that promote active participation through the production of educational content. Student groups have used Canva and CapCut to design anti-bullying campaigns that achieved widespread dissemination and meaningful impact in their communities.

Tips for effective use

01 Encourage creativity

Inspire young people to experiment with different formats and styles to find the best way to express their ideas.

02 Combine tools

Integrate graphic design, video, and interactive presentations to make messages more compelling and impactful.

03 Teach digital communication strategies

Help youth structure their messages clearly and persuasively for different audiences.

04 Apply in real-life projects

Encourage content creation for school, community, or social media initiatives with a positive impact.

! Conclusion

Mastering digital content creation tools not only enhances young people's expressive abilities but also equips them with key skills for the future. Integrating these tools into youth work promotes a more positive use of social media, boosting creativity, digital literacy, and interactive learning.

With the right support, young people can become content creators with educational and social impact, harnessing the power of digital platforms to spread knowledge and drive positive change in their communities.


05


Tools to Assess the Impact of Social Media on Young People


The use of social media among young people not only influences their communication and learning but also has a significant impact on their emotional and social well-being. For professionals working with youth, having tools to assess how social media affects their behavior, self-esteem, and mental health is essential for designing effective intervention and guidance strategies.


Data collected through these tools can help identify usage patterns, detect warning signs related to digital addiction or *cyberbullying*, and develop personalized action plans to improve how young people engage with social networks.


Key tools include

 **Google Forms** – Allows users to create customized surveys to assess digital habits and perceptions around social media use.

 **Mentimeter** – An interactive platform that collects real-time data through polls and online questionnaires.

 **NetSupport DNA** – A monitoring tool for educational settings that analyzes students' internet use and detects risks in real time.

 **Bark** – Software that monitors social media activity and messages to detect potential warning signs such as *cyberbullying*, depression, or self-harm.

 **My Digital Wellbeing** – A platform that allows young people to self-assess their digital wellness and receive personalized recommendations for improving their relationship with technology.

Application when working with youth

These tools can be applied in educational, psychological, and social work settings. A teacher, for instance, can use Google Forms to survey students on their most-used platforms and their perceived impact on daily life. Based on the results, educational activities can be developed to promote responsible social media use.

Alternatively, a school counselor might use Bark to identify students showing signs of risk related to *cyberbullying*. With this information, timely interventions can be implemented to support affected students before the situation worsens.

Tips for effective use

01 Conduct regular surveys

Periodic assessments help track changes in digital behavior over time.

02 Analyze data with intent

Don't just collect information; use it to design strategies for digital education and risk prevention.

03 Use a combination of tools

Employ various platforms to obtain a comprehensive overview of digital habits and their impact.

04 Promote self-assessment

Encourage young people to reflect on their own social media use through tools like My Digital Wellbeing.

! Conclusion

Assessing the impact of social media on youth is essential to understanding their digital habits and emotional well-being.

By integrating these tools into their daily practice, professionals can identify challenges, prevent risks, and promote healthier digital habits.

The goal is to turn assessment into an opportunity for education and awareness around achieving digital balance.


06

Apps for Digital Wellbeing and Screen Time Management


Digital wellbeing is a crucial component of healthy youth development in an increasingly connected world. Excessive time spent on social media can negatively affect concentration, sleep, and mental health. For professionals working with young people, it is vital to use tools that help them manage their time online and promote balanced digital habits.

Managing time on social media doesn't necessarily mean reducing usage, but rather finding a healthy balance that enables young people to enjoy the benefits of technology without falling into its risks. Apps designed for screen time management can help raise awareness of usage patterns and improve productivity and emotional wellbeing.


Key tools include

 **Forest** – Encourages users to stay off their phones by planting virtual trees that grow as long as they don't use their device.

 **Freedom** – Blocks distracting websites and social media to improve focus and productivity.

 **RescueTime** – Analyzes how much time is spent on social media and specific apps, providing detailed reports.

 **Offtime** – Helps users disconnect temporarily from apps and notifications to promote digital rest.

 **Flipd** – Blocks access to selected apps and motivates users to stay focused on important tasks.

Application when working with youth

These tools can be used in educational or therapeutic contexts to teach youth about the importance of managing screen time. A teacher might suggest Forest to help students stay focused during study sessions. A psychologist could recommend RescueTime to help a young person reflect on their screen time and make changes to their digital habits.

Another example involves student wellbeing programs that use Freedom and Offtime to promote uninterrupted

study periods, improving academic performance and emotional balance. These tools have been especially useful for students struggling with attention issues or sleep problems due to excessive device use before bedtime.

Tips for effective use

01 Raise awareness of screen time

Help youth understand how much time they spend on social media and how it affects their wellbeing.

02 Set realistic usage goals

Encourage youth to find a healthy balance between digital time and essential offline activities like studying, exercising, and face-to-face interaction.

03 Gamify the experience

Use apps like Forest to make reducing screen time more engaging rather than punitive.

04 Encourage digital breaks

Promote the use of apps that support disconnection and recovery from screen overexposure.

! Conclusion

Digital wellbeing is key to ensuring that technology enhances rather than hinders quality of life.

With the help of time management apps, professionals can support young people in establishing healthy routines that balance their digital and offline lives.

The focus should be on fostering self-regulation and encouraging regular digital breaks for a more balanced and productive lifestyle.


07


Mentoring and Emotional Support Platforms


Social media is not only for entertainment and interaction—it can also serve as a tool for emotional wellbeing and youth mentorship. Many young people face emotional challenges related to academic stress, anxiety, *cyberbullying*, or a lack of guidance in decision-making. Access to platforms that offer emotional support and mentorship is essential to providing the help they need in a digital environment.


Professionals such as psychologists, educators, and counselors can use these platforms to refer young people to safe communities where they can receive peer or professional support. These tools allow youth to express themselves in secure spaces and connect with people who offer empathy and guidance.


Key platforms include

 **7 Cups** – A mental health platform where trained volunteers provide emotional support and active listening.

 **Kooth** – An online mental health service tailored to young people, offering anonymous access to professional help and wellbeing resources.

 **Headspace** – A meditation and mental wellness app that helps manage stress and anxiety through relaxation and mindfulness exercises.

 **TalkLife** – A safe social network where youth can share their struggles and receive peer support from others with similar experiences.

 **Replika** – An AI chatbot that offers supportive conversations and companionship during moments of loneliness or anxiety.

Application when working with youth

Professionals can integrate these platforms into intervention strategies, recommending them to young people who need additional support outside of school or family environments. For example, a school counselor might suggest Kooth to a student experiencing exam-related anxiety, while a psychologist could recommend Headspace to improve a teenager's stress management.

A real-life success story involved a school community where students faced high academic stress. Using TalkLife, a safe space was created where students could express concerns without judgment, fostering peer empathy and mutual support. As a result, students reported lower anxiety levels and increased feelings of connection.

Tips for effective use

01 Promote mental health resources

Encourage youth to explore these platforms as safe and helpful tools for emotional wellbeing.

02 Ensure privacy and safety

Help youth understand that these tools are secure spaces where they can share concerns anonymously.

03 Integrate mentoring into education

Use platforms like 7 Cups to foster peer mentoring among youth with shared experiences.

04 Complement with offline strategies

Reinforce these tools with in-person support from educators or family members.

! Conclusion

Access to mentoring and emotional support platforms offers youth an additional resource to manage mental health and receive guidance during challenging times.

Integrating these tools into professional practice can significantly enhance youth emotional stability and coping skills in the digital world.

The key is to provide access to these platforms responsibly, within a safe and professionally guided framework.


08


Resources to Combat Disinformation and Fake News


In the digital age, information spreads quickly—and it's not always accurate. The proliferation of fake news and disinformation can distort young people's perception of reality, creating confusion, fear, and the spread of harmful narratives. That's why professionals working with youth must have tools that help develop critical thinking and information verification skills.


Fighting disinformation isn't just about spotting false information—it's about teaching youth to analyze content, cross-check sources, and evaluate the truthfulness of what they see on social media. This helps them become informed, responsible digital citizens, less vulnerable to digital manipulation.


Key resources include


 **Maldita.es** – A Spanish-language platform that debunks viral hoaxes and verifies news.

 **FactCheck.org** – An international project that investigates and refutes false information in digital media.

 **Google Fact Check Explorer** – A tool that allows users to search fact-checked news across accredited sources.

 **First Draft News** – A global initiative that fights disinformation through media literacy and fact-checking education.

 **Snopes** – One of the largest fact-checking databases, specializing in internet myths and hoaxes.

 **Media Bias/Fact Check** – A platform that analyzes media bias and helps users detect slanted news coverage.

Application when working with youth

Professionals can use these resources in educational sessions, workshops, and media literacy programs to teach youth how to verify online information. For example, a teacher might organize an activity where students use Google Fact Check Explorer to assess whether viral news is true or false.

Another approach is to run programs in schools or youth centers where students learn to spot sensationalist headlines or manipulated images. Using platforms like Maldita.es or FactCheck.org, they can develop habits of verification and learn to question online content before sharing it.

Tips for effective use

01 Incorporate fact-checking in digital education

Teach fact-checking as an essential media literacy skill.

02 Encourage questioning of sources

Show students how to trace the origin of news and evaluate media credibility.

03 Social media analysis exercises

Design activities where students spot fake news and use verification tools to assess authenticity.

04 Discuss algorithmic influence

Explain how social media algorithms work and why certain disinformation goes viral.

! Conclusion

Developing critical thinking and media literacy is essential for youth to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

Integrating fact-checking tools into education helps them distinguish between true and manipulated information and promotes a culture of digital responsibility.

Fighting disinformation is a collective effort that begins with education and awareness.

Final Conclusions



The manual *“The New Playground: A Guide to Play Safe”* aims to inform, raise awareness, and support professionals in understanding the use of social media and its influence on the emotional well-being of young people. Rather than presenting social media from a negative standpoint, this guide offers a comprehensive overview of the associated risks from an informative and constructive perspective, highlighting the possibilities available to encourage young people to use these platforms responsibly.

Instead of viewing social media as an unfamiliar and harmful environment, we must seek to understand how it works, recognize its implications and risks, and prepare ourselves to engage with the complex digital realities of today’s youth. This guide also provides a wide range of practical tools that youth workers, teachers, and educators can apply when working with young people to promote critical and healthy use of social media.

We would like to remind our readers that social media should not be seen

as a binary between good and bad; it all depends on how it is used, and we, as mentors and guides, are part of shaping that change!

**Has this
information
changed your
perspective?**

To learn more, access additional resources, practical activities, and useful links related to the topics explored in this guide, we invite you to visit our website.

<http://thenewplayground.eu/>



(dis)connected REALITIES

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