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# How to Make FOMO Work for You

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# How to Make FOMO Work for You

by Lauren Hansen

How many times have you gone onto social media and seen somebody living a perfect life? With the advancement of technology, the fear of missing out<sup>1</sup> (FOMO) has never been more prevalent. Adults and adolescents alike are often plagued with the consuming fear that people are happier and healthier than they are. No matter what successes we experience, they can seem moot compared to the accomplishments and lifestyles of the people around us.

How many times have you gone onto social media and seen somebody living a perfect life? With the advancement of technology, the fear of missing out<sup>1</sup> (FOMO) has never been more prevalent. Adults and adolescents alike are often plagued with the consuming fear that people are happier and healthier than they are. No matter what successes we experience, they can seem moot compared to the accomplishments and lifestyles of the people around us.

I've experienced this kind of fear. My first year of college, I was so excited; everyone said your college years are the best of your life! However, coming into university with these massive expecta-

tations, I found myself disappointed. In fact, I was often overwhelmed with a fear of missing out—of never being able to match my reality up to my expectations.

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and more, what it could be if I focused on redirecting the fear I was feeling. What changed my experience—and really my life—was learning how to make the FOMO I was feeling *work for me*. Certain steps helped me, and I hope they can help you too.

Though I had a hard first year, the next few years got progressively better. After suffering for so long, I started slowly finding ways to change my perspective on what my life was,

## Be Aware

Reportedly, 90% of teenagers have used social media.<sup>2</sup> In our generation, we are constantly exposed to influencers, advertisements, and 'highlight reels.' Fear of missing out is a natural thing to feel after this kind of exposure. In fact, that is a major goal of advertising.

Researchers have reported a significant correlation between exposure to advertising and negative life satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> Media presents perfected products and people. As a result, we are left with infeasible desires and become unsatisfied with what is real. With this culture of insatiable expectations, it's no wonder that we feel FOMO when we compare our average everyday to the manufactured highlights of those around us.

So what can we do about it? One key action is to be aware of the media we view, keeping in mind that advertisements and influencers benefit from your dissatisfaction with life. This can be a small yet important step in making FOMO work for you.

## Listen to Your Feelings

When dealing with FOMO, it is important to approach our feelings in kind and reasonable ways. Unhealthy ways to deal with emotions include denial, withdrawal, and self-harm whether physical or mental.<sup>4</sup> Hence, a crucial part of making FOMO work for your life is to stop and listen to your feelings. Our fears about life can help us discover things about ourselves that we wouldn't have known otherwise. How will

**Nearly 70% of millennials have reported feeling FOMO. Use these feelings to start living the life you want to.**

you know what things you like to do or what person you want to be if you don't try some things out?

In my college experience, I often felt jealous of people who could make friends so easily. So, after a while of avoiding these feelings, I decided to try to reach out to the people around me. Looking back, my ability to listen and move through my feelings allowed me to make lasting friendships.

As you aim to listen to your feelings, remember that you are not alone. It may be surprising that nearly 70% of millennials have reported feeling

FOMO.<sup>5</sup> These fears that transcend age groups may be part of life now. However, you can use these feelings to proactively start living the life you want to.

## Be Reasonable

After paying attention to our fear of missing out with kindness, remember that while our feelings may be valid, it does not mean that they define reality. In order to truly make FOMO work for our lives, we need to be reasonable in our goals.

As an example, we can take small and simple steps toward our desires instead of large leaps. SMART goals, a scientifically approved way to conceptualize these steps, can help small actions transform your life.<sup>6</sup> SMART goals emphasize important characteristics of setting life goals, such as being specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. An aspect of SMART goals that specifically helped me was the concept of attainability. In college, I envied people that could easily give profound answers,

so I made goals to speak up in class more—even just once a week. Now, I am able to answer questions in almost any class period—all because of simple steps. As we strive to make the fears we feel motivate us to do better, it is vital to take reasonable, realistic steps.

## Choose Your Path

While some FOMO can motivate us to make healthy changes in our lives, it can also be dangerous. Chasing what makes other people happy has the potential to further decrease our happiness and self-esteem. We really need to ponder whether the desire to have or do something will truly benefit us. If the path ahead seems too stressful or unclear, personal and professional help<sup>7</sup> is just a call away. Sometimes, it takes an outside source to help us better understand who we are and who we want to be.

Through it all, dealing with FOMO is sometimes an overwhelming and never-ending task. How-

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ever, we can find ways to make it work for our lives. Changing my perspective on FOMO has helped me to become more confident, positive, and productive. I have spent less time stressing about measuring up to the people around me and more time experiencing the things in life I want to. I have learned to love myself in a way my younger self would have yearned to. I believe as we harness the power of FOMO, we can be happier and healthier than we were before—and who doesn't want that? As we think critically about the media we take in, what we desire, and the ways we can better our lives, we can make the fear of missing out help us to live a life that is better than before.

## Endnotes

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