



Oh No, It's FOMO

Fear of missing out, and what we're really missing

- A printable conversation guide for parents & kids ([tips](#))
- Takes 10-15 minutes
- 2024 update

Produced by

Screenable

getscreenable.com

@get.screenable

Conversation preview

This is an overview of the conversation guide, and it's for parents to read before starting the conversation with kids. Parents, if you're already with your kids, feel free to skip this section and move straight to the guide.

→ Intro

In this era of social media, the fear of missing out (FOMO) can lead to anxiety and a constant need to stay connected. How does it affect our kids, and how can we help them build resilience and balance in their digital lives?

→ Together you will learn

- What FOMO is and how it's amplified by specific social media platforms and digital culture
- The latest research on its impact on our mental health, self-confidence, and overall well-being
- How we might detect signs of FOMO in our everyday lives, and develop personalized, healthy digital practices as a family

The guide

Read these instructions out loud. This guide should take 10-15 minutes to complete. There are 5 sections. Read each section header out loud as well as any instructions. Let's start with a quick icebreaker.

→ 1. First reaction

There's no right or wrong. Answer in just a few sentences, no more than 30 seconds. Kids go first. Optionally feel free to jot down any thoughts or feelings below.

What do you know about FOMO? Have you felt it?

👉 FOMO is the fear of missing out, like when we know others are having fun without us.

→ 2. What's the big idea?

Parents read this out loud, or switch readers for each paragraph. Together choose the quick read (appropriate for younger kids) or the full read.

Quick read (2min)

Ever felt like everyone's having fun without you? That's called FOMO, or Fear Of Missing Out.

It's a normal feeling we all get sometimes. Even when we're happy, FOMO can suddenly make us feel left out.

Why does this happen? One reason is our phones and social media. We see pictures of friends doing lots of fun things that we otherwise might never have known about.

But remember – people don't share photos of all the parts of their day, like doing their homework or washing the dishes!

FOMO can make us feel anxious, like butterflies in our stomach. Sometimes, we keep checking our phones to feel better. But like eating too much candy, it doesn't make us feel good for very long, and might even make us feel worse.

How do we stop FOMO? It starts with noticing the feeling itself. Then some things do help, like spending less time on our phones. Not checking social media right after waking up or before bed. Finding activities we love doing. Hanging out with real-life friends.

Over time, we can find JOMO, the Joy of Missing Out. Because otherwise, it's our own lives we're missing out on. ✌️

Full read (3min)

You know that sinking feeling that other people are having more fun than you are? Doing more interesting things? Living life more fully?

FOMO is the Fear Of Missing Out, and it's completely normal. We're hardwired to compare ourselves to others, to want to belong and feel accepted. Research shows that the feeling impacts all of us, even introverts, and especially young adults.

What's worse, it strikes even in moments when we're happy and content. Just knowing that other people are having a good time without us can bring on FOMO and spoil our current mood.

One problem is that our phones and social media let us know way more about a large number of friends and peers than we could offline. We get an endless feed of the apparently great lives other people are living.

We know life isn't the nonstop good times we see online. Those same people are also doing their homework, straightening their rooms, and cleaning dirty dishes. We don't see many of those photos. But even knowing we're not seeing the reality of people's lives, we still often get the feeling of FOMO.

Physically, FOMO can actually trigger anxiety and survival instincts in our body, like faster heartbeats or stomach knots. To stop these feelings we often reach for our phones, checking our messages or social media just one more time, so we at least feel in touch with what's going on.

But it's a short-term fix. It doesn't last, because even if it feels good for a moment, long-term it's actually causing the very feeling we're trying to avoid.

It's a lot like junk food that way – lots of fat and sugar but no long-term healthy nutrition.

So, how can we fight FOMO? It starts with noticing that we're feeling FOMO, that loneliness or upset when others are having fun without us. Then a few things can help, like getting off our phones and getting outside. Being mindful of what we are experiencing, not what we're missing. Talking to the supportive adults in our lives. Finding our own passions or starting projects that bring us joy, just for ourselves. Not checking social media first thing in the morning or last thing before bed. And connecting with just one or two close friends.

It takes time, but if we keep working on it, we'll start to feel JOMO – the Joy of Missing Out. Because otherwise, it's our own lives we're missing out on. 🙌

→ 3. Questions

Take turns answering a few questions, in about 5 minutes total. “Experienced” questions are for those who have encountered this topic in apps or online. Choose one of you to go first (rock-paper-scissors?).

Beginner

- Do you know anyone who seems to be constantly comparing their life to what they hear about others doing? What are the downsides of doing this?
- Have you ever had a time when your friends had fun while you weren’t around? How did it make you feel, and what did you do about it?
- What friend groups would you feel most FOMO with, if they were doing something fun or exciting without you? What would you do in that case?
- Have you ever decided to do something primarily because you didn’t want to miss out? Did you feel good about that decision and the experience?

Experienced

- Do you know anyone who seems to be constantly trying to keep up with everyone else online? What are the good and bad sides of doing this?
- Have you ever been on social media or elsewhere online and found out about friends who had fun without you? How did it make you feel, and what did you do about it?
- What friend groups would you feel most FOMO with, if they were doing something fun or exciting without you? What would you do in that case?
- Have you ever consciously decided not to do something even though you knew you’d feel FOMO later? What was it? How did you feel during it, and then afterwards?
- Who do you admire? What about them do you admire? How can you build more of those traits and experiences into your life?

→ 4. Activities

Choose an activity that interests you both. If you have time, choose another.

Social Media Reflection

Scroll through social media (or if you prefer, a celebrity gossip site) and find posts of people having fun, in happy relationships, or doing interesting things. Talk about how each one makes you feel about yourself and your own life. If any made you feel jealousy or FOMO, take a moment to notice the feeling, then say one positive thing about the people in the photos, and make a quick plan to take action in your own life. If any photos made you feel grateful or happy for them, enjoy that you are using empathy skills.

Behind the Smiles

Take a look through recent photos of people you know (family or friends) when you weren't there. Take turns guessing what they were feeling and thinking in the photos. (Hint: it's not as easy as it sounds!) Compare your answers. If you have time, check to see if you're right by asking that person what they were really thinking or feeling.

Fake Photo Fun

Take a photo together that makes it look like you're having way more fun than you actually are. Think of a caption to support it. Then pretend to post it online. Talk about how you feel posting it. Talk about how you think it might make other people feel who see it. Now be sure and take a second photo that you feel is real and authentic! Talk about how you'd feel posting that one.

→ 5. Make a family plan

Together select the ones you agree to do going forward. Put them up somewhere so you can revisit them from time to time.

- Detect and remind.** When we notice we are feeling FOMO, we'll take a pause before reacting in any way. We will remind ourselves that it's a normal and very common emotion.
- Assess engagements.** When we decide to attend an event or get together with friends, we'll ask ourselves if we're excited about the activity itself, or just trying to avoid FOMO. If we're not sure, we'll discuss it within the family to help each other prioritize activities that genuinely bring us joy.
- Prepare for the feeling.** When we choose to do something that might lead to FOMO, like staying in or doing something else, we'll remind ourselves of our reasons and how "missing out" is often good for us in the long term.
- Resist devices.** When FOMO strikes, we'll resist the impulse to check our phones or devices. Instead, we'll do an activity we enjoy, get outside, or take a few moments for mindfulness or relaxation.
- Connect with others.** When FOMO strikes, we'll reach out to a friend or family member and open up about our feelings of FOMO, reminding ourselves that connecting personally with close friends is one of the best ways to combat it.

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