

# MODULE 3: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO MISINFORMATION

## MODULE OVERVIEW

This module aims to equip teachers with the knowledge and strategies to help students aged 12-17 understand and navigate the complexities of emotional aspects when using social media. We will explore cognitive biases, manipulative techniques such as labelling, and the importance of mindfulness in fostering emotional resilience in the digital age. Key topics include the significance of self and social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills within the framework of social-emotional learning (SEL). By integrating these concepts, teachers will be better prepared to guide students in developing critical thinking skills, emotional intelligence, and a responsible approach to social media use, ultimately promoting a more informed and empathetic generation.

## MODULE OBJECTIVES

**Upon completion of this module, students will be able to:**

- ◆ Identify and understand cognitive biases influencing perception of information we encounter on social media
- ◆ Recognize commonly used manipulative techniques used to spread false news
- ◆ Understand how habits influence our activities on social media
- ◆ Develop self and social awareness skills to deal responsibly with social media content

## STRUCTURE OF THE MODULE

### 3.1: Understanding the emotional impact of misinformation

- ◆ The psychology of misinformation: why people believe and share false news
- ◆ The role of cognitive biases in accepting and spreading false information
- ◆ How manipulative techniques trigger emotional responses (fear, anger, anxiety) and lead to rationalization to mislead us

### 3.2: Building emotional resilience against misinformation

- ◆ Strategies to manage emotional reactions to misinformation
- ◆ Mindfulness and critical thinking: slowing down reactions to emotionally charged content
- ◆ Social Emotional Learning (SEL) - teaching students emotional intelligence in the digital sphere



### 3.1. UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION

In exploring the vulnerability of individuals to believe and share misinformation, it is essential to recognize the role of media—historically and in the contemporary digital landscape. We can see the role of media in spreading misinformation in the history on the example the invention of the press. It is well documented (Doten-Snitker et al., 2024) how the new communication technologies (like printing) can accelerate spreading the misinformation. During the witch hunts of the 15th to 17th centuries, the proliferation of printed pamphlets and pamphlets amplified baseless accusations, creating an atmosphere of fear and hysteria that led to widespread persecution. In the same way today, social media has accelerated this process, allowing misinformation to spread rapidly and reach vast audiences, often without critical scrutiny.

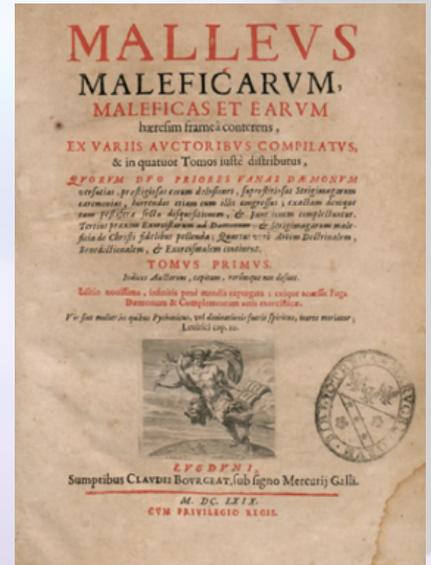
Concerning our increased ability to share with the existence of social media, the research shows (Sorouh et al., 2028) that:

- ◆ The “falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information”.
- ◆ The “false news was more novel than true news, which suggests that people were more likely to share novel information. Whereas false stories inspired fear, disgust, and surprise in replies, true stories inspired anticipation, sadness, joy, and trust”.

The researchers would conclude that the “false news spreads farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth because humans are more likely to spread it”.

Why are people vulnerable to believe and share false news and narratives could be attributed to the following aspects or our perception of information and cognition:

1. **Confirmation Bias:** People tend to favour information that confirms their existing beliefs.
2. **Repetition Effect:** Repeated exposure to information increases its perceived truthfulness (closely connected to the representativeness and availability biases).
3. **Emotional Appeal:** Misinformation often triggers strong emotions, making it more memorable and likely to be shared. Emotional appeal is often part of manipulation used to affect the listener perception.
4. **Rationalization:** Justifying our behaviour or an attitude with logical reasons, even if these are not appropriate. Rationalization is often used as manipulative technique to mislead the recipient of the information.
5. **Social Proof:** Seeing others believe or share something can reinforce its perceived validity and is closely related to Confirmation bias (sense of belonging).
6. **Cognitive Overload:** In a fast-paced digital environment, people may not have the capacity to critically evaluate every piece of information. Our lack of time or just not willing to invest the effort to check the information provided (see the Module 2 and 5 for more detail on fact-checking).
7. **Manipulative techniques:** The acceptance of disinformation is promoted by the use of manipulative techniques that are designed to abuse our basic cognitive functions and exploit our biases through emotional and rationalization manipulation. These could be used consciously or unconsciously.
8. **Habit of sharing information:** Our behaviour on social media is, to a large extent, influenced by our habitual patterns. “Once habits form, perception of context cues automatically brings the practised response to mind, and people respond with limited sensitivity to outcomes such as misleading others or acting contrary to personal beliefs” (Ceylan et al., 2023).



Title page from a 1669 edition of the *Malleus maleficarum*, a handbook on witchcraft originally published in 1487.

In the following chapters, we will take a closer look at the aspects that we can address with students in the class, namely the cognitive biases, the manipulative techniques used and the role of habits.

## The role of cognitive biases in believing and sharing false news

During evolution, we have been equipped to survive in a very complex environment with a need to make quick decisions to catch the prey or to avoid danger. This need to make quick decisions equipped us with the ability to interpret perceived information based on:

- ◆ our experience, the information we already possess,
- ◆ our emotional response (e.g. fear means to run; desire or excitement leading to attraction or willingness to do something).

This response was built into us very strongly as it is directly connected to our survival. And as we could survive only as a part of a social group and we would not survive as an individual, we have also learned how to act and behave to be accepted in the group. In this way, we tend to develop our perception of our own identity and need to belong, as individuals often define themselves through group affiliations that provide a sense of security and acceptance. All these still strongly influence our perception of information, leading us to “make shortcuts” and interpret and often distort the information in a way that supports our own perception of identity. These errors are called cognitive biases.

A cognitive bias is a subconscious error that leads us to misinterpret information we perceive, and thus affects the accuracy and relevance of our decisions and action.

It is important to understand that cognitive bias is not a logical fallacy. Logical fallacy represents an error in logical argument. However, cognitive bias is influencing our perception and interpretation of the information itself.

Cognitive bias influences WHAT information we perceive and HOW we interpret the information we have perceived.

Among the most important cognitive biases that are influencing our perception of information and how we act on social media (what we share) are the following biases (ACTIVE Toolkit, see Other sources):



◆ **Confirmation Bias** is a tendency for people to favor information that confirms their preconceptions. Basically, it is about receiving and interpreting information that supports one's position on an issue. It allows us to conclude that our views are correct but may often obscure reality as we do not see things as they are but as we want them to be. Confirmation bias leads us to receive, perceive and interpret information in a way that is confirming our “current selves” (our beliefs, our conceptions of the topic, our mental models, our desires, our status, our behavior, our likes, our attitude etc.).

Confirmation bias plays a very strong role in the way people interact and are influenced by social media. The confirmation bias is making us to:

- ◆ **LOOK UP** mainly/only information confirming our viewpoint (selective exposure).
- ◆ **PERCEIVE** information in a way that confirms our point of view (people, thanks to confirmation bias, hear only some parts of the story/information presented and ignore the parts that do not fit our conception). This aspect is crucial to understanding that confirmation bias distorts what we actually see (perceive) and, hence, the information we are getting and remembering.
- ◆ **INTERPRET** information to favor our point of view. Neglecting or relativizing the information contradicting our point of view or rationalize the explanation to support our point of view.



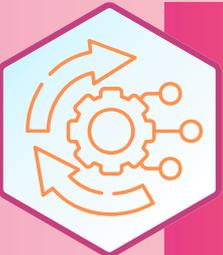
### **Representativeness bias**

is the tendency to judge the truthfulness of information by the amount of available data that resembles it. In this way, repeated exposure to information increases its perceived truthfulness.



### **Availability bias**

is that we are influenced by information that is readily available to us. As a result, we often forget that we may not have enough relevant information to make a relevant judgment.



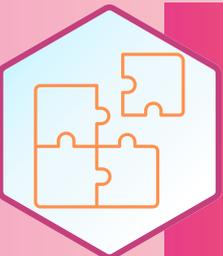
### **Projection bias**

is the implicit assumption that others think, believe, or know the same as we do. It is about not recognising others as individuals with their own personalities, values, and beliefs. Projection bias is basically a perception where we make from our current self a universal norm how we see and judge the others.



### **Correspondence bias (or fundamental attribution error)**

is the tendency to attribute a person's behavior to their personality rather than to situational factors. Mostly, it serves as a projection of our attitude toward the person to interpret the given situation. For example, if we do not like someone, we may see everything he/she does as insidious or intended to harm us.



### **Blind spot bias**

is when we recognize bias in others but fail to see it in ourselves. We tend to think that we are less likely to be biased than others (for more about blind spot bias see: [Researchers Find Everyone Has a Bias Blind Spot](#)).

Unfortunately, the above biases are strongly supported by social media algorithms, which are designed to present us with only the information we are already in favour of, thus directly supporting our confirmation, representativeness and availability biases. In this way, social media promotes so-called "echo chambers" and reinforces misinformed beliefs.

Projection, correspondence and blind spot biases then reinforce our confirmation bias and lead us to attribute meaning to the information we perceive, which can make us angry, furious and lead us to reject or hate others. Or, on the other hand, to be positively inclined towards someone who actually has no good intentions.

As research shows (Hart et al., 2009) motivations to defend our point of view (confirmation bias) is stronger with:

- ◆ value-relevant involvement, when I feel attachment or loyalty to the point of view
- ◆ challenging (vs. supporting) information makes people get into defensive state
- ◆ apparently high-quality information that supports their point of view
- ◆ sacrificing for the view by personal commitment (e.g. making public proclamation)
- ◆ dedicating time and effort to get the knowledge and opinion about the topic so far
- ◆ closed-minded individuals

As the above suggests, it is often very difficult for people to let go of their perceived 'truth' about the issue, as it often means admitting that a lot of effort has been wasted, and also having to disassociate myself from what I have strongly identified with. In this sense it is important to understand that we do not deal with just a rational opinion about something but that we deal with something that is strongly connected to our perception of our self (our identity)

## The role of manipulative techniques in believing and sharing false news

Manipulative techniques play a key role in the success of spreading disinformation and fake-news through the social media. Manipulative techniques are designed to abuse our basic cognitive functions and to exploit our biases through emotional and rationalization manipulation.

Based on research we can describe the main following manipulative techniques to be used to promote disinformation and fake-news:

- Emotional language: Emotions are powerful tools of persuasion. Research shows that using emotional words and images, especially ones that evoke negative emotions such as fear or outrage, increases the viral potential of social media content.
  - False Dilemma (False Dichotomies): A false dilemma (or false dichotomy) is a logical fallacy that presents a limited number of options as if they are mutually exclusive, thereby dismissing other possibilities. In this way, the narrator wants to deceive you into believing there is no other alternative, even though more choices exist.
  - An example of a false dilemma would be saying: "You either support our environmental policies, or you don't care about the planet." This statement presents only two options: supporting the policies or being uncaring. In reality, there are other possibilities, such as supporting some policies but not others, suggesting alternative solutions, or caring about the environment without agreeing with the proposed policies. This oversimplification ignores the complexity of opinions and choices.
  - Incoherence: Incoherence occurs when someone uses two or more arguments to make a point that cannot logically all be true at once. It is used by conspiracy theory propagators who often base the conspiracy on some real phenomena but then add sinister motives or hidden causes working behind to explain complex phenomena in a simplistic way.
  - Scapegoating (Blame-shifting): Blame shifting (or scapegoating) is a powerful and commonly used manipulative technique. It refers to placing the blame for problems or undesirable outcomes on a particular individual or group in order to divert attention from the real issues or to deflect responsibility. This technique creates a false impression and rallies others against the scapegoat.
1. **Example:** An extreme example of blame-shifting (scapegoating) would be the Nazi approach to blaming and scapegoating, particularly towards Jews. This serves as a historical example of a manipulative technique used to foster division and hatred. By portraying Jews as the source of societal problems—such as economic hardship or political instability—the Nazis dehumanized this group and shifted public frustration away from the regime's failures. This scapegoating strategy not only unified their followers through a common enemy but also justified discriminatory policies and violence. This serves as a critical lesson in understanding how misinformation and emotional manipulation can lead to harmful ideologies and actions. Unfortunately, we can see similar tendencies used by today's politicians (e.g. blaming emigrants, blaming the EU Green Deal, etc.).
  2. **Example** from school environment: Blaming someone when a team receives a poor grade in a school project, saying, "It's all your fault we failed! You didn't do any work!" In this scenario, the blaming student is using the other team member as a scapegoat to deflect responsibility from the entire group. Instead of acknowledging that the project was a team effort and that everyone shared some responsibility, the blame is unfairly placed on one person. This oversimplifies the situation and avoids addressing the real issues.



### **Ad Hominem Attacks:**

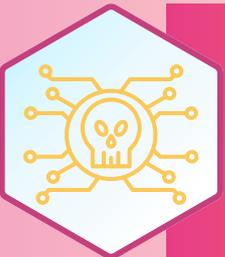
An ad hominem attack occurs when someone responds to an argument by attacking the character or personal traits of the individual making the argument rather than addressing the argument itself. This technique is often used to divert attention away from the actual issue and focus instead on the person, undermining their credibility without engaging with their points.



### **Labelling:**

Labeling is often used to foster ad hominem attacks and scapegoating. It is a manipulative technique that involves tagging individuals or groups with negative or misleading labels to influence perception and behavior. This tactic simplifies complex issues by reducing people to a single characteristic or stereotype, making it easier to dismiss, dehumanize, or justify negative actions against them.

An example is labelling individuals or a group as "radicals", "extremists", "alarmists", or "trolls" or "haters" without considering their viewpoint and evidence provided. Or calling a student "the shy one" can pigeonhole them and affect how others perceive and interact with them.



### **Fake expert:**

A fake expert is someone portrayed as an authority in a specific field (e.g., a doctor or scientist) but who either does not exist or lacks genuine expertise. It's important to verify the credibility of any presented 'expert' to ensure they have the qualifications and experience they claim. Therefore we should always question the legitimacy of the presented authority when evaluating information.

## **The role of habits in spreading false news**

Habits play a significant role in the sharing attack of false news on social media by influencing how individuals engage with content. When users develop the routine of quickly scrolling through their feeds, they may impulsively share articles or posts without verifying their accuracy. This habitual behavior is often driven by manipulative content in combination with the users' biases that trigger emotional or rationalization responses leading users to prioritize speed and engagement over critical evaluation of the information. Social media algorithms reinforce these habits by promoting sensational or popular content, creating a cycle in which false news can spread rapidly. The users are also directly motivated to share sensational content to gain likes and views valued by the social media. Over time, these habits establish patterns of misinformation sharing, making it harder for individuals to discern credible sources from misleading ones.

## Negative psychological impacts of using social media for teenagers

Psychological impacts and potential risks associated with using TikTok and other social media, particularly for teenagers:

1

### Addiction and Compulsive Use:

The platform's design encourages continuous scrolling, which can lead to excessive use and difficulty disengaging.

3

### Body Image Issues:

Exposure to curated and edited content can lead to negative body image and self-esteem problems, as teens compare themselves to idealized representations.

5

### Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):

Seeing others' highlights can create anxiety about missing out on experiences or not measuring up socially.

7

### Social Pressure:

The desire to gain likes and followers can push teens to engage in risky or inappropriate behavior for validation.

9

### Influence of Trends:

Teens may feel pressured to participate in viral trends, some of which may be dangerous or inappropriate.

2

### Diminished Attention Span:

Rapid, short-form content may contribute to reduced attention spans and difficulty focusing on longer tasks.

4

### Cyberbullying and Harassment:

Teens may encounter bullying or negative comments, which can affect mental health and emotional well-being.

6

### Privacy Concerns:

Sharing personal information and content can lead to privacy breaches and unintended exposure.

8

### Desensitization:

Repeated exposure to sensational or harmful content may lead to desensitization or normalization of certain behaviors.

10

### Sleep Disruption:

Late-night use and bright screens can interfere with sleep patterns, affecting overall health and academic performance.

Understanding these risks can help teachers and parents guide teens towards healthier social media habits.

## 3.2. BUILDING EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AGAINST MISINFORMATION

### Strategies to manage emotional reactions to misinformation

How we respond to the information we encounter on social media is to a great extent influenced by **our ability to overcome our biases and to avoid manipulation** that we are exposed to on-line (by manipulative techniques) or offline (e.g. peer pressure). This ability is influenced by our ability to act consciously.

**Acting consciously** means understanding yourself, your situation (including others involved), and the possible consequences of your actions. This we can call **responsible decision-making**.

**Don't react  
respond  
consciously**

Therefore, to promote resilience against disinformation and encourage responsible behaviour among students, we should implement techniques that **enhance emotional intelligence and mindfulness**.

**Emotional Awareness:** refers specifically to the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions and the emotions of others. It involves being aware of how feelings influence thoughts and behaviours, allowing individuals to better navigate their emotional experiences.

**Emotional Intelligence:** broader concept encompasses emotional awareness along with the ability to manage emotions, regulate emotional responses, empathize with others, and navigate social complexities. Emotional Intelligence includes skills like emotional regulation, social awareness, and relationship management.

**Mindfulness** is the practice of being fully present and engaged in the current moment without judgment. It involves paying attention to thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment with an open and accepting attitude. Mindfulness practice is an effective tool for developing conscious responses to upcoming situations and promoting responsible actions in social media context.



## Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a well-designed approach for conceptualising and developing skills for emotional awareness, empathy, and conscious decision-making.

SEL consists of five main components:

### SELF-AWARENESS:

Self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values. It allows individuals to reflect on their thoughts and feelings, fostering personal insight.

Relevance and application for students in the context of social media:

- **Emotional Triggers:** Enables students to recognise their emotional responses to social media content.
- **Online Behavior:** Students can reflect on their online actions to align with their values.
- **Self-Image:** Helps students critically assess how social media influences their self-esteem and self-perception, allowing them to distinguish between authentic self-image and their identity on social media.
- **Peer Influence:** Students can identify how peer pressure affects their social media choices, enabling them to make more conscious decisions.
- **Empathy:** Students become more attuned to their emotions, which can enhance their ability to empathise with others.
- **Mindfulness Practices:** Incorporating mindfulness techniques helps them stay focused and calm while using social media.

01.

### SOCIAL AWARENESS:

Social awareness is the ability to empathize with others and understand social dynamics and cultural contexts. It involves recognizing social cues, diverse perspectives, and the needs of others. Teachers can enhance social awareness by incorporating activities that promote empathy, such as discussions on diverse cultures and community involvement projects that encourage students to consider the viewpoints of others.

Relevance and application for students in the context of social media:

- **Diverse Perspectives:** Students learn to appreciate different viewpoints and backgrounds represented on social media.
- **Empathy:** Increased empathy leads to more respectful online communication. It helps reduce cyberbullying and promote kindness.
- **Social Cues:** Recognizing social cues improves understanding the context and emotional tone behind posts and comments, which can inform more thoughtful responses.
- **Media Representation:** Students can critically assess how different groups are portrayed on social media, fostering a deeper understanding of stereotypes and can identify scapegoating manipulation.
- **Social Issues:** Socially aware students are more likely to engage in discussions about social justice and current events.
- **Supportive Communities:** Awareness encourages students to contribute positively, fostering a sense of belonging and support among peers.
- **Online Relationships:** Understanding social dynamics promotes healthy interactions in digital spaces.

02.



### 03. SELF-MANAGEMENT:

Self-management entails the ability to regulate emotions, set goals, and maintain motivation despite challenges. It involves developing coping strategies and resilience. Teachers can foster self-management by teaching time management skills, stress-reduction techniques, and goal-setting practices, enabling students to navigate challenges effectively and remain focused on their objectives.

#### Relevance and application for students in the context of social media:

- **Impulsive Decisions:** Awareness of emotional triggers helps students to avoid impulsively sharing or reacting to posts.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Students learn to manage their emotions when confronted with upsetting content online, reducing impulsive reactions.
- **Stress Management:** Recognizing social media's effects helps students to deal with the social and emotional pressure.
- **Resilience:** They build resilience by learning to navigate online challenges and setbacks, fostering a positive outlook.
- **Goal Setting:** They set personal goals for healthy social media habits, such as limiting screen time or curating positive feeds.
- **Time Management:** Students learn to balance social media use with other responsibilities, promoting a healthy lifestyle.

### 04. RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING:

Responsible decision-making refers to the process of making choices based on ethical considerations and the potential impact on oneself and others. This involves evaluating consequences, considering the well-being of others, and using critical thinking skills. Teachers can encourage responsible decision-making through activities that involve problem-solving scenarios, discussions about ethical dilemmas, and reflections on past decisions.

#### Relevance and application for students in the context of social media:

- **Reflective Thinking:** Developing critical thinking skills encourages reflection on past decisions and their outcomes.
- **Evaluating Information:** Students learn to critically assess the credibility of information before sharing it online.
- **Considering Consequences:** They think about the potential impact of their online actions on themselves and others.
- **Ethical Choices:** Students understand the importance of making ethical decisions regarding content sharing and interactions and of not using manipulative techniques to “persuade” others.
- **Managing Impulses:** Awareness of emotional responses helps them pause before reacting to provocative posts.
- **Weighing Options:** Students practice weighing different perspectives before making online choices.
- **Seeking Help:** They learn to ask for guidance from trusted adults or peers when faced with difficult decisions.

### RELATIONSHIP SKILLS:

### 05.

Relationship skills encompass the ability to communicate effectively, work collaboratively, and build positive relationships with others. This includes active listening, conflict resolution, and teamwork. Teachers can promote relationship skills by facilitating group projects, role-playing exercises, and discussions that teach constructive communication techniques, thereby helping students foster healthy social interactions.

#### Relevance and application for students in the context of social media:

- **Effective Communication:** Students learn to express themselves clearly and respectfully in online interactions.
- **Active Listening:** They practice listening to others' perspectives and responding thoughtfully, fostering better conversations.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Students develop skills to handle disagreements constructively in digital spaces.
- **Building Trust:** They learn the importance of trust in online relationships and how to cultivate it through honesty and integrity. Using empathy skills helps students strengthen their online connections.
- **Setting Boundaries:** Students learn to establish healthy boundaries in their online interactions, ensuring respectful and safe relationships.

# KNOW AND MANAGE YOUR HABITS USING SOCIAL MEDIA

## Practical Activity 1

(OFFLINE)

### Objective:

Help students identify and reflect on their social media habits to promote more conscious and responsible usage.

### Instructions:

#### 1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Begin with a brief discussion about social media habits. Ask students to share what platforms they use most frequently and why. Discuss common habits, such as scrolling mindlessly, sharing content without verification, or comparing themselves to others.

### Materials:

- Journals or paper
- Pens or pencils
- A whiteboard or chart paper
- Sticky notes

#### 2. Habit Reflection (10 minutes)

Prompt students to spend a few minutes writing in their journals about their social media usage.

Encourage them to consider the following questions:

- How much time do you spend on social media each day?
- What types of content do you engage with (videos, articles, posts)?
- What content do you post/share yourself?
- What is the goal you are seeking when posting/sharing posts on social media?
- Do you consider the possible impacts of posting/sharing posts on social media (how the other might feel about it, what the post could evoke in others)?
- How do you feel before and after using social media?
- Do you often find yourself sharing content without checking its reliability?



### 3. Group Discussion (15 minutes)

- Form small groups (4-5 students each) and have them share their reflections with one another. Encourage them to discuss common themes, positive habits, and habits they want to change. Assign each group a sticky note color to note down key takeaways or insights from their discussions.

### 4. Class Discussion and Creating a Habit Chart (10 minutes)

- On a whiteboard or chart paper, create a "Social Media Habits" chart with two columns: "Positive Habits" and "Habits to Change." Have each group share 2 to 4 (depending on number of groups) positive habit and one habit they want to change. Write these in the appropriate columns.
- Make students discuss the most relevant habits and make them debate what habits they mostly follow, and make them reflect on it.

### 5. (optional) Developing Personal Action Plans (10 minutes)

- Ask students to create a personal action plan for using social media more consciously. They can set specific goals, such as limiting time spent on platforms, verifying sources before sharing, or engaging with content that uplifts them.

### 6. Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

- Conclude with a class discussion about the insights gained and the importance of being mindful of social media habits. Encourage students to commit to their action plans and support one another in their goals.

#### Assessment:

- Monitor group discussions for engagement and understanding.
- Review the habit chart for common themes.

#### Follow-Up:

- Encourage students to revisit their action plans after a set period (e.g., one month) to reflect on their progress and make any necessary adjustments.

# UNDERSTAND YOUR FEELINGS TO DEVELOP SELF-AWARENESS SKILLS

## Practical Activity 2

(OFFLINE)

### Objective:

The exercise is designed to help students understand their own emotions and develop one of the key components of self-awareness skills. It will help students identify and manage their emotional responses to social media content. The ability to identify own emotions is a crucial skill for managing emotional responses to social media content and for building healthy relationships in the online and offline world. For more detail see the social-emotional learning SEL in Module 3.

The exercise could also be used in foreign language classes to learn new vocabulary concerning emotions and feelings.

The exercise could be modified for art class by using drawing or abstractions (colour etc.) for depicting the feelings.

### Instructions:

#### 1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Begin with a brief discussion on how social media can influence emotions. Ask students to share any experiences where they felt a strong emotion after viewing or reading something online.
- For introduction a short TikTok video could be shown to the class for inspiration:

[TikTok video link](#)

#### 2. Exploration (10 minutes)

- Display various social media posts (fictional and appropriate) that might provoke different emotional reactions (e.g., excitement, anger, sadness). Ensure a variety of content is shown.

### Materials:

- Social media posts (fictional and appropriate) that might provoke different emotional reactions (see examples in the materials)
- Projector or screen for displaying content (posts could also be printed on paper and handed to the groups of students)
- Copies of a "Feelings Wheel" or emotion chart
- Journals or paper for writing
- Additional: PC connected to the internet and projector to show introduction on TikTok or YouTube video (see links below)

#### 3. Group Discussion (10 minutes)

- Divide the class into small groups. Provide each group with a "Emotion Wheel" (2) or emotion chart.
- Ask them to identify the emotions they might feel when they see each type of content presented.
- (optional) Make students Create an on-line word cloud from the

#### 4. Self-Reflection (10 minutes)

- Have students individually reflect and write in their journals about a recent social media interaction that triggered a strong emotion. Encourage them to explore why it affected them.

(2)The Emotion Wheel was created by Robert Plutchik to help patients identify and describe the 8 core emotions: Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, Anticipation, Surprise, Disgust, and Trust.



### 5. (optional) Mindfulness Practice (5 minutes)

- Lead a short mindfulness exercise focused on breathing, encouraging students to practice calming techniques when they encounter emotional content online.

### 6. Closing Discussion (5 minutes)

- Come back together as a class and discuss strategies for managing emotional responses in a healthy way.
- Encourage students to share insights and strategies they have learned.
- Teacher can discuss with students specific situations, people, or events that trigger strong emotional responses can help in developing coping strategies for future encounters.
- Point out to students that they should refer to emotions as "comfortable" and "uncomfortable" (and not as "positive/good" and "negative/bad"). Remind students that all emotions, both "comfortable" and "uncomfortable", provide to us valuable information.

### Assessment:

- Monitor group discussions for understanding.
- Review journal entries to ensure students are recognizing and exploring their emotions.

### Follow-Up:

- Encourage students to apply these reflection techniques during their personal social media use over the next week and discuss changes they observe in their reactions.
- Stress that it is okay to feel emotion or be excited about something; the goal here is for students to be able to reflect on their emotions.
- Remind students that all emotions, both "comfortable" and "uncomfortable", provide to us valuable information.
- Encouraging students to talk to friends, family, or a mental health professional about their emotions and the effects of social media. This can provide comfort and perspective, helping to process emotions in a supportive environment.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Annex: Emotion Wheel

### Annex: Set of social media posts to reflect upon the feelings

We are working on these materials so they could be used for translation

Additional definitions for the exercise:

Feelings are subjective experiences that arise from specific emotions and reflect personal interpretations of emotional responses. They are influenced by individual thoughts and experiences.

Emotions, on the other hand, are physiological responses to stimuli, often characterized by distinct physical reactions and expressions. Emotions are generally more automatic and can include basic states like joy, anger, fear, and sadness.

In summary, emotions are the initial reactions to stimuli, while feelings are the personal, internal experiences that arise from those emotions.

Definitions for each of Robert Plutchik's eight primary emotions:

1. Joy: A feeling of great pleasure and happiness. It often arises from positive experiences, achievements, or fulfilling relationships.
2. Trust: A sense of security and reliability in someone or something. It is the foundation of healthy relationships, fostering openness and connection.
3. Fear: An emotional response to perceived threats or danger. It serves as a protective mechanism, prompting individuals to react to protect themselves.
4. Surprise: A brief emotional response to an unexpected event or situation. It can be positive or negative and often leads to curiosity or shock.
5. Sadness: An emotional state characterized by feelings of loss, disappointment, or sorrow. It often prompts introspection and a desire for comfort.
6. Disgust: A strong feeling of aversion or repulsion towards something considered unpleasant or offensive. It serves as a protective response to avoid harmful substances or situations.
7. Anger: An emotional response to perceived injustice, frustration, or threat. It can motivate assertive actions but can also lead to destructive behaviors if not managed appropriately.
8. Anticipation: A feeling of excitement or expectation about a future event. It can generate enthusiasm or anxiety, depending on the context and outcome expected.



# LEARN TO COPE WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

## Practical Activity 3

(OFFLINE)

### Objective:

Help students understand and reflect on the importance of accepting mistakes, asking for help, and recognizing that it's okay to have feelings or not to know everything. Challenging negative thoughts and reframing them into a more positive or realistic perspective can help reduce emotional distress. This exercise creates a comfortable space for mental health and show students how they can deal with difficult situations.

### Instructions:

#### 1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Begin with a brief discussion about the importance of making mistakes, seeking help, and acknowledging limitations. Ask students to share times when they felt unsure or experienced challenges and how they overcame them.

#### 2. Group Formation (5 minutes)

- Divide the class into small groups of 4-5 students.

#### 3. Group Brainstorming (15 minutes)

- Each group receives a large sheet of paper and is tasked with creating a mind map around the theme "It's Okay To...".
- Encourage them to brainstorm as many ideas as possible regarding what is acceptable in terms of mistakes, seeking help, or admitting uncertainty. The themes should be motivational, positive or seek solutions (see additional materials for examples).
- They can write down phrases, draw pictures, or use symbols to represent their ideas.

### Assessment:

- Monitor group discussions and presentations to gauge understanding.
- Use students' reflections to assess their comfort with the themes explored.

### Materials:

- Large sheets of paper or poster boards
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Sticky notes
- A timer

#### 4. Reflection with Sticky Notes (10 minutes)

- After completing their mind maps, each student takes a sticky note and writes down a personal experience related to one of the ideas on their group's mind map (e.g., a time they made a mistake or asked for help).
- Students then place their sticky notes on their group's poster.

#### 5. Presentations (10 minutes)

- Each group presents their mind map to the class, explaining their thoughts and sharing insights from the sticky notes.

#### 6. Class Discussion (10 minutes)

- Facilitate a discussion where students share what they found most valuable from the exercise. Highlight common themes and emphasize the importance of understanding that struggling is part of learning.

#### 7. Closing Activity (5 minutes)

- To wrap up, have students silently reflect and then share one takeaway from the exercise. This can be a sentence they write on a piece of paper or something they vocalize in a circle.

### Follow-Up:

- Encourage students to keep their mind maps and revisit them in the future, reinforcing the idea that embracing mistakes and uncertainties is okay.
- The created mind maps could be placed on the class wall for future reference, or if there is time left, the class can create one map reflecting the outcomes of the group activity.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Suggestions on how to lead students to create the mind map:

Design Concept for "It's Okay To..." Mind Map Chart

1. Central Circle:

- Place a large circle in the center labeled "It's Okay To..."

2. Branching Segments:

Create several thick lines extending from the central circle to smaller circles surrounding it. Each smaller circle can represent one of the main themes, such as:

- Be yourself
- Make Mistakes
- Ask for Help
- Not Know Everything
- Have hard days
- Feel your feelings
- To start over again

3. Sub-branches:

From each smaller circle, draw thinner lines branching out to more specific phrases or ideas related to the theme. The themes should be motivational, positive or seek solution.

For example, under "Make Mistakes," you might include:

- "It's a part of learning"
- "Everyone makes them"
- "Mistakes help us grow"

For example, under "Ask for Help," you might include:

- "Seek support to get help"
- "Talk to friend"
- "Talk to parents"

4. Visual Elements:

Use different colors for each theme to make it visually appealing.

Add illustrations or icons next to each theme. For example:

- A lightbulb for ideas
- A question mark for asking help
- A heart for support

5. Sticky Notes Section:

- Reserve a section on the chart for sticky notes, where students can later add their personal experiences related to the themes.
- This chart can be created on a large sheet of paper or on a whiteboard, allowing students to visually engage with the concepts as they brainstorm and reflect during the activity.

# MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE CONSCIOUS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

## Practical Activity 4

(OFFLINE)

### Objective:

Implementing these techniques can help students cultivate mindfulness, enhance emotional regulation, and improve their ability to critically assess information.

### Instructions:

Concrete mindfulness techniques that can be effectively used in the classroom:

1. **Mindful Breathing:** Begin or end classes with a few minutes (could be 1-3 minutes) of deep breathing exercises. Students focus on their breath which helps center their thoughts:
  - Option 1: inhaling for a count of four, holding for four, and exhaling for four.
  - Option 2: deep slow inhaling to comfortable fullness, holding breath naturally till it feels comfortable, and deep slow exhaling.
2. **Body Scan:** Guide students in a body scan meditation, where they focus on different parts of their body, noticing any tension or discomfort. This practice can enhance self-awareness and relaxation.

### Materials:

- Class or outdoor environment

3. **Five Senses Exercise:** Encourage students to take a moment to observe their surroundings using all five senses. They can describe what they see, hear, smell, touch, and taste, fostering awareness of the present moment..
4. **Mindful Journaling:** Allocate time for students to write reflectively about their thoughts and feelings. Prompts like "What am I grateful for today?" or "What emotions am I experiencing right now?" can help students process their experiences.
5. **Gratitude Circle:** Create a space for students to share something they are grateful for, promoting positive emotions and a sense of community.
6. **Mindful Listening:** Pair students up and have one speak for a minute while the other listens without interrupting. Afterward, the listener summarizes what they heard, reinforcing focused attention and empathy.
7. **Nature Walks:** Organize outdoor walks where students can focus on the sights, sounds, and smells of nature, enhancing their connection to the environment and promoting relaxation.

## Blame Game: Unpacking Social Media Manipulation

### Spotting Scapegoating and Misleading Language in Social Media Posts

## Practical Activity 5

(ONLINE)



Both the online and digital-free activities can be accessed on: <https://wiseme.eu/module3-students-en/>

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- **Other sources**
- **ACTIVE Toolkit: Methodology for teachers providing other sources and perspectives for the covered topics** (<https://www.active-citizen.eu/active-results>)
- **Inoculation Science** (initiative from JIGSAW, University of Cambridge and University of Bristol). See videos on the web site discussing different manipulative techniques.
- **Netflix document series: Hitler and the Nazis: Evil on Trial, which very well depicts issue of scapegoating and its consequences** (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt32331294>)

