



## Well@Work Podcast Episode 19: Managing Media in Chaotic Times

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky's Center on Trauma and Children, this podcast is brought to you by a grant from SAMHSA. On this episode of the podcast Emily Smith discusses tips for managing media consumption. And now, Emily Smith.

Hi, my name is Emily Smith with the University of Kentucky's Center on Trauma and Children, and I'm here to share some techniques for managing media during these chaotic times. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, news and social media feeds are filled with stories about this new "normal:" demands for social changes, healthcare workers making sacrifices, massive economic change, and many stories of lives cut short. It can be overwhelming. How do you stay up to date on current events without the panic scrolling that leaves you stressed and exhausted? Learning to manage media time may help reduce stress, leave us with more rewarding lives, and help us sleep better.

In the 2015 article, *Mass Media and the Contagion of Fear: The Case of Ebola in America*, the authors asked if easy access to information triggered Ebola panic or if we were facing a fast spreading digital epidemic of fear. When the authors examined Ebola-related internet searches in the U.S. during a six-week period in 2014 when Ebola was a part of the daily news coverage, the findings were interesting. Each epidemic-related news story brought tens of thousands of tweets and internet searches. As Joan Donovan remarked in an October 2020 article in the American Journal of Public Health, "Search and social media companies are not designed to deliver authoritative, relevant, and local information." Further, the goal of these for-profit companies is building revenue through advertising, so information can be lost amidst the clickbait. Compound that with the algorithmic news feeds of social media where posts that are popular, rather than relevant, are displayed more prevalently to encourage engagement. Not only does this suck us, in it also plays on pre-existing bias. Seeing other users comment or promote a trending issue especially users that we admire or agree with can lead to what the Brookings institute calls a "confirmation bias machine." A 2018 paper *No more FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression* noted the irony that a social media use in excess of 10 minutes per day may increase loneliness and depression. Study participants reported feeling happier, less anxious, and more focused when they limited their amount of time spent on social media. So how do we stay informed of current events and local public health recommendations without falling prey to clickbait? And how do we prevent a news cycle from triggering our own trauma as we process daily stress from work in healthcare or as behavioral health professionals?

Tip 1: limit your news consumption. There are many connections to the news that are personal which may heighten stress. Studies show that repeated media exposure during a crisis can increase anxiety and repeated exposure of triggering videos may cause secondary traumatic stress. If you feel overwhelmed by the day's events, consider taking a break from your news routine. If you're able to keep

up with the day's events, choose news sources that cover issues with a variety of perspectives or get your news from a broad range of sources. If something seems factually incorrect, use a search engine to fact check.

Tip 2: take a break from social media. Set aside time to look at pictures of your friends' cute kids or pets and then put your phone away. Turn off the notifications for your accounts. You may also want to mute words or phrases that are triggering so that you see fewer of those stories in your feed. Try replacing the time with the hobby you were too busy for pre-COVID-19. And taking a break from social media doesn't need to feel isolating, replace that endless scrolling with face timing or even calling friends and family.

Tip 3: make the hour before bed tech free. If you have trouble falling asleep make sure you avoid looking at your phone for the hour before bed. The blue light emitted by your phone can restrict melatonin, a hormone that controls your circadian rhythm, and the information you read can stimulate your brain and engage you psychologically. Create a bedtime routine that begins with mindful meditation or gentle stretching. If you struggle with that recreate your childhood routine: bath, brush, books, bed.

Building healthy media habits takes time. New research suggests that it may take two months for a habit to form, it may help to replace your media habits with healthier activities that reduce stress, help you sleep better, and add joy to your life. Look for more resources, programs, and tools on our website, and remember to stay well at work.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast. Follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work.

