

FACILITATOR RESOURCE GUIDE

Healthy Habits on Social Media

Building Pause-and-Choose Habits in a Fast-Scroll World

For facilitators working with teens and student groups

WHAT'S INSIDE

- A ready-to-use opening hook and supporting research
- Step-by-step instructions for the Opposites Game warm-up
- A plain-language explainer of System 1 vs. System 2 thinking
- Discussion guides on brain rot, mental health, and creativity
- Two teachable coping techniques: Urge Surfing and STOP
- Closing discussion on healthy, real-world alternatives
- Facilitator tips, timing, and a full source list

Session at a Glance

This guide walks a facilitator through a full session on healthy social media habits, from opening hook to closing discussion. Timing is approximate; adjust based on group size and how much discussion each section generates.

Segment	Time	Purpose
Opening Hook	3–5 min	Grab attention; introduce the speed of impulsive vs. intentional decisions
Opposites Game	8–10 min	Physically experience the effort of overriding an automatic response
Explain: System 1 vs. System 2	5–7 min	Give participants shared language for what they just felt
Discussion: Why It Matters	10–12 min	Connect the concept to brain rot, mental health, and creativity
Techniques: Urge Surfing & STOP	10–12 min	Teach two concrete tools to engage System 2
Closing Discussion: Alternatives	8–10 min	Brainstorm healthy replacements for autopilot scrolling
Total	~45–55 min	

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Open space where participants can stand and move (Opposites Game)
- Printed or projected QR code linking to the supporting research article
- Whiteboard or flip chart for capturing discussion responses
- Optional: printed copies of the STOP and Urge Surfing steps as a take-home card

1. Opening Hook

Use this hook to open the session. Read it slowly and let the comparison land before moving on.

SAY THIS

“It takes your brain less than half a second to make an impulsive decision. That’s faster than blinking. It can take several minutes to make an intentional decision. Many digital platforms are designed to keep you in that first mode.”

FACILITATOR NOTE

- The article, “Adaptive Decision-Making 'Fast' and 'Slow': A Model of Creative Thinking,” describes how the brain's fast (System 1) and slow (System 2) processes trade off, and how that trade-off

shapes creative and reflective thinking. It grounds the System 1 / System 2 concept used throughout this session.

2. Activity: Opposites Game

A physical warm-up that lets participants feel, in their own body, the effort it takes to override an automatic response — the same effort it takes to interrupt a scrolling habit.

How to run it

1. Round 1: Direct instructions: Give simple physical commands one at a time (“stand up,” “talk,” “raise your hand,” “sit down”). Instruct participants to do exactly what is said. Move at a quick, steady pace.
2. Round 2: Opposite instructions: Explain the new rule: participants must now do the opposite of each command (“stand up” → sit down; “talk” → stay silent; “raise your hand” → lower it). Give the same commands, at the same pace.
3. Notice the difference: In Round 2, most groups slow down, hesitate, or make mistakes. Point this out: hesitation is the brain pausing to override an automatic response.

Debrief questions

- Which round felt easier? Why?
- What did it feel like in your body when you had to stop and think before reacting in Round 2?
- Where else in your life do you notice that same pause, or the lack of one?

FACILITATION TIP

Keep Round 1 fast and easy so the contrast in Round 2 is obvious. A little chaos in Round 2 is the point—it's evidence, not a problem to fix.

3. Explain: System 1 vs. System 2 Thinking

Give participants shared vocabulary for what they just experienced in the Opposites Game. This framework comes from psychologist Daniel Kahneman and is echoed in the supporting research shared during the opening hook.

System 1: Fast, Automatic, Reactive

- Operates in a fraction of a second, driven by impulse and habit.
- Rewards immediate action over reflection: this is the mode Round 1 of the Opposites Game used.
- This is where behaviors like doomscrolling take hold: one quick, low-effort decision (“open the app,” “keep swiping”) leads to extended, often unintentional engagement.

System 2: Slow, Deliberate, Reflective

- Takes more time and mental effort: this is the mode Round 2 of the Opposites Game required.

- Involves stepping back to notice how time is being spent, and whether it feels meaningful.
- Is the mode this whole session is designed to strengthen.

WHY THIS FRAMING MATTERS

Social media platforms are built to reward System 1: infinite scroll, autoplay, and personalized notifications remove natural stopping points, so users stay in fast, reactive mode rather than shifting into reflective System 2 thinking.

4. Discussion: Why Does This Matter?

Use these talking points to guide an open discussion. Pose the framing question, let participants respond first, then add research context where useful.

Framing question: What happens when we live in System 1 mode too much of the time?

“Brain rot” and mental health

- In 2024, Oxford University Press named “brain rot” its Word of the Year, defining it as the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state from overconsuming trivial online content. Its usage rose 230% that year, a sign of how many people feel this happening to them.
- Research on doomscrolling links habitual, anxious scrolling to higher anxiety, depression, and existential worry. The pattern often becomes circular: scrolling to soothe discomfort ends up increasing it, which drives more scrolling.
- Studies on adolescents connect heavy, passive social media use to emotional dysregulation, fear of missing out (FOMO), and a less stable sense of identity.

Active engagement vs. passive viewing

- Passive use—scrolling without interacting—is more consistently linked to worse mood and wellbeing than active use, which involves creating, responding, or connecting with others.
- Active participation, like creating content, writing, or having real conversations, is associated with more positive affect and a stronger sense of accomplishment.

Creativity and life trajectory

- Deep, original thinking depends on System 2, the slower mode that platforms are designed to bypass. When attention is constantly pulled back into fast, reactive scrolling, there is less time and mental space left for the kind of sustained focus creativity requires.
- Ask participants: What would you make, build, or try if you reclaimed the hours currently spent on autopilot scrolling?

DISCUSSION TIP

This section can go in many directions. If time is short, prioritize the doomscrolling/mental health point and the closing question about reclaimed time—those tend to generate the most personal, honest discussion.

5. Techniques to Engage System 2 Thinking

Teach both techniques as practical tools participants can use the next time they notice an urge to check their phone, buy something impulsively, or keep scrolling past the point of enjoyment.

Technique 1: Urge Surfing

Urge surfing is a mindfulness technique developed by psychologist Alan Marlatt. It treats an urge like a wave: it rises, peaks, and eventually passes on its own—usually within a matter of minutes—if you don't act on it.

1. Notice the urge. Name it out loud or in your head (“I want to check my phone,” “I want to buy this”).
2. Notice the physical feeling. Where do you feel it? A racing heartbeat, tightness in the chest, restlessness?
3. Breathe. Take a few slow breaths and stay with the sensation instead of reacting to it.
4. Ride the wave. Let the urge rise and fall without acting on it for about 10 minutes.
5. Notice what happens. Most urges lose their intensity well before the 10 minutes are up.

TRY THIS PROMPT

“Think of a recent moment when you felt the urge to check your phone or buy something online. Notice what that urge felt like in your body. Now imagine just breathing through it for ten minutes, without acting. What do you think would happen to that urge?”

Technique 2: The STOP Technique

STOP is a four-step mindfulness tool, often taught in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and stress-reduction programs, that interrupts an automatic reaction in real time.

1. Stop. Pause whatever you're doing — put the phone down, close the app.
2. Take a breath. One or two slow, deliberate breaths to calm your nervous system.
3. Observe. Notice your emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations without judging them.
4. Proceed with intention. Choose your next action deliberately, rather than on autopilot.

FACILITATION TIP

Have participants practice STOP right in the moment: ask everyone to pull out their phone (or imagine doing so), then walk through all four steps together out loud before they're allowed to unlock it.

6. Closing Discussion: Healthy Alternatives

End the session by shifting from awareness to action. Ask participants to brainstorm real alternatives to reaching for a phone out of habit.

Framing question: What's one thing you could reach for instead of your phone?

- Go outside. Time in nature—even 20 to 30 minutes—is linked to lower anxiety and depression, better focus, and improved mood.
- Connect with a person in real life. Face-to-face connection supports wellbeing in ways passive scrolling doesn't; even brief in-person interaction can reduce feelings of isolation.
- Make something. Channel System 2 thinking into a creative outlet—drawing, writing, music, building something with your hands.
- Move your body. Physical activity is a natural way to shift out of an automatic, reactive state.

Close by asking each participant to name one specific alternative they'll try the next time they notice the urge to scroll. Writing it down or saying it out loud increases the odds it sticks.

Key Takeaways

- Impulsive (System 1) decisions happen in a fraction of a second; intentional (System 2) decisions take longer—and many platforms are built to keep users in System 1.
- Noticing the pause is a skill, not a personality trait. The Opposites Game shows it can be practiced.
- Urge Surfing and STOP are two concrete, repeatable tools for engaging System 2 in the moment.
- The goal isn't to quit social media—it's to make engagement a choice rather than a reflex.

Sources & Further Reading

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