

Three steps for getting over social media envy: Advice from a psychologist

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

In the past, you may have envied your neighbor when they bought a new car or went on holiday abroad when you could not. Although these feelings of envy would have been perfectly valid, they were isolated incidents that would last for a short period of time.

Today's world is vastly different, as we carry comparison machines around with us in the form of mobile phones. The rise of social media has had many benefits but also given rise to social media envy when users perceive the perfect lives of others—even though they are rarely as perfect as they seem on the surface.

Envy is pain at another's [good fortune](#), according to the ancient philosopher [Aristotle](#). Thanks to social media, this definition written over 2,000 years ago seems more relevant than ever.

[Research has shown](#) what you've probably long suspected, that [social media users](#) post socially desirable information to present a better image of themselves to others. And social media allows users to carefully select the information they [share](#).

This can lead to [social comparison](#), which is where we think about information about other people in relation to ourselves. Our own lives are for the most part mundane, but social media can make it appear that everyone else's are not. This can make us feel different emotional responses.

These emotions can be positive or negative. For example, sometimes envy can lead to [self improvement](#). [Researchers](#) have found that students studied for longer, and their [academic performance](#) improved, when they were envious of their successful peers. This is referred to as "[benign envy](#)."

But some envy can lead to [negative emotions](#). You might feel low and have negative thoughts towards the envied person who you perceive to be in a better position than you. This is referred to as "[malicious envy](#)."

As envy is a natural response, it is important to allow yourself to feel the emotion. The real trick is making sure you stop malicious envy and

harness benign envy. But how can you do this?

1. Acknowledge your feelings

By accepting that you are envious of someone when you have viewed a post on social media, [you have made the first step](#) to adopting a healthier response. You can then make the decision to use this feeling to fuel self improvement.

This shift in perspective can help as you may obtain the lifestyle or object that you were envious of in the first place.

2. Follow and unfollow

Next, try to identify [role models](#) as well as people to avoid or unfollow. Role models can be anyone that encourages a sense of benign envy and promotes wanting to improve. This could be friends, family or a celebrity.

Identifying those that you feel malicious envy towards is equally as important. Unfollowing these people may be beneficial.

Think of it this way: you may drink certain [alcoholic drinks](#) because they make you feel happy, relaxed, or excited. On the other hand, you may find that some lead you to be argumentative, so you avoid these drinks. The same should go for your social media use.

If there is something promoting a [negative response](#) from you, try to take steps to mitigate it, such as unfollowing or turning off post notifications.

3. Practice moderation

As in many areas of life, using social media in moderation is key. While sometimes we will take inspiration from social media posts, we can also find ourselves wishing for the demise of the person on the other side of the phone. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of these two types of envy and channel your energy into self-improvement rather than negative or malicious feelings.

Yochi Cohen-Charash, a researcher of emotions at Baruch College in New York [states that](#) "the target of [envy](#) will always be somebody who is comparable to us." So remember, if you are envious of anyone, then they are probably in a similar situation to you—whether that is presented on their [social media](#) or not.

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