Anxious, stressed post-election? Limit social media

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Got the post-election blues? Want to celebrate your candidate's win without someone bringing you down? You know you could stay off your social-media accounts to keep your pulse low, but if you're like many of us, you can't cut the cord completely.

Here are some tips from Seattle-based mental-health counselor Julene Weaver and other social-media experts for setting boundaries that may help you steer clear of the most provocative posts and unchecked rumors.

Decide for yourself whether you really need to log in. Perhaps you'd rather listen to music. It may be healthier for you to avoid disturbing news and videos for a few days and that's OK, Weaver said.

Instead, try calling an old friend, going outside, exercising or playing a video game. If you still want to spend time on your electronic devices, try prioritizing which sites are important to you, set a time limit and log off when done.

"Don't get on and scan and scan. Set boundaries about what you will say and stick to them," Weaver said. "Evaluate what is important for your mental health and have the courage to say no."

Here are four questions she asks clients to answer as they strive to create social-media buffers.

How much do you allow in?

Decide how long you will watch or listen to the news, said Weaver. A half hour, an hour a day, or in a week? Make a decision and try setting an alarm and then abiding by it. For those who are committed to getting their news fix, psychotherapist Philip Cushman suggests seeking balance by finding a well-written, well-reported article by someone's whose views oppose yours. "It's good to read things that help us think about, and try to understand, the other side."

What to keep out?

Can you skip what you know will be a disturbing image or video on your Facebook feed? Acknowledge and accept that some people matter more to you than others. Don't respond to views you don't agree with. If someone gloats, ignore them. And remember, it's perfectly fine, good even, to quietly unfollow or unfriend people who say things that raise your blood pressure. Why are you holding on? Let them go!

What should you keep in?

If you are a person who has trouble letting go of disturbing thoughts and images, Weaver advises logging in briefly and then setting a goal to interact positively and "create a wave of micro-kindnesses" to offset the constant negativity by, for example, "liking" others' posts, sharing inspiration and encouragement, posting a picture of something beautiful. "Let people know you are compassionate," Weaver said.

If you must share on political or contentious matters, do so in a calm and neutral tone and present evidence-based and accurate information.

What is OK to release and what's the best way to release it?

Weaver says when she decides to let go of something distressing, such as the rancor and bitterness that's been the hallmark of this election, it's easier to do so after she's taken a walk and interacted pleasantly with others. "Anything that lets me feel the flow of positive energy helps, like seeing a baby or a cute dog," she said.

Also, getting involved in a constructive causes can be liberating, Weaver said. She suggests sending cards to people, signing petitions and getting involved in groups that take political action.

One last thought. Before you start worrying about something that hasn't happened, think about how rumors and false stories spread on Twitter and Facebook faster than they can be verified.

According to First Draft News, a guide to navigating media from discovery to verification, "rumors" that are true are resolved generally within two hours while it takes closer to 14 hours for a false claim to be debunked online.

Researchers have found that tweets reporting unverified rumors are retweeted more often, therefore, spread further and more quickly than truths.

In addition, according to First Draft, there is a "small industry of fake news websites which publish fake content on a daily basis, aimed at generating and monetizing web traffic. While fact-checking is a growing field, it still produces less content on average than the fakers. It can't keep up."

Therefore, it's wise to verify information with what you consider to be a credible news source, whether that's Snopes.com, The Seattle Times , The Washington Post, or The Wall Street Journal, before you retweet or freak out.

Best yet, just wait a day and see what shakes out.

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