

# THE COMPARISON TRAP

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**Over the past few months, we have scrolled various social media platforms and witnessed the notorious “year in reviews”. People sharing their highlights from 2021. These highlights being a culmination of the shiny, happy, bright, and wonderful moments in different peoples’ lives. It can be tempting and easy to fall into that comparison trap. Comparing yourself, your relationship (or lack thereof), your friendships, your belongings, your grades, your job, your recovery, and the list could go on and on. This increase in comparison can significantly impact our mental health.**

According to the social comparison theory, we are wired as human beings to engage in this behavior and we are highly unlikely to stop. However, in 2022, we can set the new year resolution to take proactive actions to safeguard our mental health, harness these comparisons, and become intentional in using comparisons in a more helpful way. Below are a few ideas to get you started this new year:

## **Social Media**

Social media is one of the most common spaces to fall into the comparison trap. You don't have to eliminate social media, but you could decrease your screen time allowing for less time to passively scroll and getting caught in unhelpful comparisons. You could also begin filtering the content that you follow. This could look like “unfriending/unfollowing” completely or “muting” specific accounts if you feel uncomfortable totally cutting ties. You could also focus on adding positive content to your social media timeline that makes you feel good. This could look like seeking out content like funny memes, mental health awareness, self-care related, affirmations, etc.

## **Mindfulness**

Begin practicing mindfulness by paying attention to when and how you are comparing. While bringing this into your awareness, you can take inventory by asking yourself “Is this serving me? Is this helping me reach my goals?” If the answer is “no”, be gentle with yourself and re-focus your attention elsewhere. Sometimes we have made so many harmful comparisons throughout our lives that it feels automatic and too difficult to notice when it is happening. It could be helpful to use your emotions as a signal. This could sound like, “Am I hurting myself through comparing again?”

## **Reframing Perspective**

Comparisons can truly be inspiring. Other people's experiences can act as a motivator or a message of hope. You may consider reflecting on people that are role models in your life and then using positive comparison to help you on your journey to becoming the best version of you. For example, identifying someone who is further along in their recovery and using that comparison to inspire you to pursue your own healing journey!

## **You vs. You**

You can compare you to you! Instead of focusing your attention on others, noticing your own growth can be validating or inspiring. You are the expert on what you have been through and what you have accomplished so use this knowledge to your advantage.

I hope that as we embark upon 2022, you consider taking steps to safeguard your mental health from the harmful effects of falling into the comparison trap. As human beings, we all experience happiness and sadness, highs, and lows, wins and losses. Let this new year be one of honoring the entire human experience, letting go of the highlight reel, and being more intentional in how we compare ourselves to others.