



American Expression E2565 FOMO

IOTS Publishing Team  
International Online Teachers Society  
Since 2011

The term FOMO, short for “fear of missing out,” describes the anxiety or uneasiness people feel when they believe others are experiencing something rewarding or enjoyable without them. It reflects a deep psychological worry that one might be excluded from opportunities, events, or social interactions that seem meaningful. In the digital age, FOMO has become increasingly common because people are constantly exposed to curated moments of others’ lives through social media. These glimpses often exaggerate how exciting or successful others appear, fueling the sense of being left out.

At its core, FOMO is driven by social comparison. Humans naturally evaluate themselves against others to understand where they stand socially, emotionally, and professionally. When people see friends traveling, attending gatherings, achieving career milestones, or even buying new products, they may feel pressured to keep up. This comparison can create a sense of inadequacy or dissatisfaction with one’s own life, even when nothing is actually lacking. The fear arises not from a real need but from the perception that others are living better or more fulfilling lives.

Technology amplifies FOMO because social platforms display only highlights. People rarely share their struggles, mundane routines, or failures. Instead, they show moments that reflect joy, success, or fun. As a result, viewers may mistakenly assume that such moments represent the norm rather than the exception. This illusion can trigger emotional discomfort, pushing individuals to check their devices more frequently or participate in activities primarily to avoid feeling left out rather than to genuinely enjoy them.

FOMO affects behavior in many ways. Some people overschedule themselves to avoid missing anything, while others constantly monitor notifications, updates, or news feeds. In extreme cases, it can influence financial decisions, such as impulsive purchases, investments, or participation in trends simply because others appear to be doing so. These reactions may temporarily ease anxiety but often lead to stress, exhaustion, or regret. The cycle repeats because the underlying fear of exclusion remains unaddressed.

Emotionally, FOMO can erode confidence and well being. Feeling left out can trigger loneliness, envy, or a sense of inadequacy. When people believe they are falling behind socially or professionally, they may experience heightened stress or diminished self worth. Over time, this can affect mental health, relationships, and overall life satisfaction. The constant desire to stay connected or included can make it difficult to relax or focus on personal goals.

Managing FOMO requires intentional awareness. Recognizing that social media presents only selective highlights helps reduce unrealistic comparisons. Setting boundaries, such as limiting screen time or prioritizing meaningful offline experiences, can strengthen emotional resilience. Practicing gratitude for one’s real life circumstances also shifts focus from what is missing to what is already present. These strategies help individuals regain balance and reduce the pressure to keep up with others’ curated lives.

In conclusion, FOMO is a modern emotional challenge fueled by comparison, digital exposure, and the belief that others are experiencing something better. Understanding its roots and impacts allows individuals to develop healthier habits, strengthen self awareness, and cultivate contentment in their own lives rather than chasing the illusion of constant inclusion.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. How does social media intensify feelings of FOMO, and which platforms tend to influence it the most?
2. What emotional or psychological needs are people trying to fulfill when they respond to FOMO driven impulses?
3. How can individuals distinguish between genuine interest in an activity and participation motivated purely by FOMO?
4. What strategies can help reduce FOMO while still staying socially and professionally connected?
5. How does FOMO impact decision making in areas like finances, relationships, or career choices?