

# LEAVE NO TRACE FOR EVERY KID™

# SOCIAL MEDIA

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

ACTIVITY



There is little question that social media plays a role in the promotion of various outdoor locations, and in some cases, has led to significant resource and social impacts. It's logical to ask, "Would this place be as impacted as it is now had it not been for Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or Pinterest?" Social media, like any tool or technology, can be a force for good or it can have the opposite effect. What if every social media post also included a message of stewardship? Think how different things would or could be if this were the case. Leave No Trace isn't black or white, right or wrong. It's a framework for making good decisions about enjoying the outdoors responsibly, regardless of how one chooses to do so. If outdoor enthusiasts stop and think about the potential impacts and associated consequences of a particular action, it can go a long way towards ensuring protection of our shared outdoor spaces.

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This discussion guide will help you approach meaningful conversations and activities with youth participants about social media's role in promoting various outdoor locations. This is an important topic not only because of the nature of social media's impacts to the outdoors over the last couple of years, but also because of the opportunity to engage youth in a topic that is hyper-relevant to them. Largely speaking,



social media is relevant and accessible to just about every young person today. In many ways, it is more accessible and relevant than the outdoors itself. Framing discussions around Leave No Trace through this medium—a technology and modern convenience that has been largely rejected by most outdoor educators—provides an excellent opportunity to bring young people into the conversation around responsibility in the outdoors.

## PREPARING STUDENTS

At the time of this guide being written, impacts resulting from social media usage are only a few years old, and thus a relatively new branch of Leave No Trace education. Many students may not be aware that such an issue exists, or that the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor



## YOUTH PROGRAM ACCREDITATION

This resource comes from the Leave No Trace Youth Program Accreditation, which provides directors, managers, teachers, and other youth program staff leaders with essential tools and best practices for the administration of Leave No Trace programming. For more information visit: [lnt.org/accreditation](http://lnt.org/accreditation).

Ethics has released a list of recommended practices to promote positive ways to engage with social media when in the outdoors.

In addition to educating yourself about the issues at hand, it is important to present students with information about the issues at hand. Below is a list of digital articles that can be used to create the framework for future discussions and activities. This guide also includes a short PowerPoint deck that illustrates the types of social media posts that reflect the negative and positive impacts to outdoor spaces.

## NEWS AND MEDIA ARTICLES\*

[What happens when nature goes viral?](#) - The Goods by Vox, 10/31/2018

[The Deadly Waterfall in the Age of Instagram](#) - The New York Times, 8/14/2018

[No, You Definitely Did Not Sleep There](#) - National Geographic, 11/7/2017

[How the Rise of Outdoor Influencers is Affecting the Environment](#) - Racked, 8/27/2018

[Is Instagram Ruining the Great Outdoors?](#) - Outside Online, 3/29/2017

[How social media hurts and helps the great outdoors](#) - Marketplace, 5/29/2017

[How Social Media Is Revolutionizing the Outdoor Community](#) - The Outbound Collective, 9/28/2016

[Hikers for an 8th Leave No Trace Principle](#) - Personal Blog

[Instagram shuts Down Trail Trash Of Colorado Page That Shamed Bad Backcountry Behavior](#) - Colorado Public Radio, 8/1/2018

[This Account is Reclaiming the Indigenous Names for Mountains One Geotag at a Time](#) - Smithsonian, 2/22/2018

[Before you snap a nature 'gram this summer, think about what you're doing to the environment](#) - Desert Sun, 6/26/2018

[Let's Talk About Geotagging](#) - The Morning Fresh, 5/6/2019 \*\*includes some strong language\*\*

[Siberian lake loved by Instagrammers is toxic, power plant says](#) - BBC News, 7/10/2019

[What's Being Done to Save Wild Spaces from Instagram](#) - Outside Online, 4/5/2019

[Stop Blaming Instagram for Ruining the Great Outdoors](#) - Vice, 7/26/2019

*\*Online articles, blogs and other information sources may include links, ads or other pop-up related items that cause distraction, or in some cases may be inappropriate for certain learners, campers, or students. While all of the above links have been vetted for their content, there is no way for ads and the like to be completely vetted. Make sure to view the articles before sending them out. Similarly, content could be copied into a separate word document for distribution.*

## WAYS TO PREPARE YOURSELF AS AN EDUCATOR

**Educate yourself** - Sounds like a no brainer but this is the first step to leading an affective discussion or activity with youth participants. Familiarize yourself with all of the suggested articles above, as well as the [Leave No Trace Social Media Guidelines](#). This collection of



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links has been curated to represent the widest variety of views and sub-issues related to social media usage and the outdoors. This list will continue to grow as the issues continue to develop in the future. Check back with the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics for updates as needed.

**Knowing social media** - The various social media platforms and their intended vs colloquial uses may be very familiar to you. In other instances, you may find them very foreign. Educating yourself about the ins and outs of these platforms, and how youth engage with them, is essential. Youth are walking experts in this evolving technology and this requires educators to strive to be the same.

**Face it, youth know more about social media than you ever could** - A reality that educators should openly accept: youth participants know infinitely more about social media. Research and recommendations from youth-centered organizations can help adult educators come closer to understanding social media, but more work is needed. This presents an amazing opportunity to bring young people into the discussion, allowing educators to learn directly from their students. It may be useful to build in elements of “what is social media?” into the greater discussion so that educators and their participants can come up with a common language and cultural understanding of social media.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the following questions to help you plan activities, course work, or simply to start the conversation:

- What do you think about the call for an 8th principle of Leave No Trace? What is the argument that 8th principle-supporters are making? How do the Leave No Trace Social Media Guidelines address social media usage and the outdoors without creating an actual 8th principle?
- Some social media users respond to less-than responsible outdoor posts by shaming the users and their posts. What kind of culture and reaction does internet shaming create?

## DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES\*

- **Writing exercise** - ask students to come up with a response to the Leave No Trace Social Media Guidelines. What do these recommendations mean to them? Do they agree or disagree with them? What do they mean for the whole population of people using social media to post photos of outdoor locations?
- **Creative arts exercise** - have participants work in small groups to create a social media campaign that educates users about the potential negative impacts to the outdoors, as well as the ways to be proactive and responsible when sharing content about the outdoors. This type of exercise should also include considerations from the various digital literacy and social media citizenship curricula—see links to these sources below. This type of activity would have students actively using various social media platforms to complete the activity. Students should be prepared to present their campaign to their peers.



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- **Analysis exercise** - have participants work in small groups to analyze the outdoor responsibility being promoted by various outdoor brands or organizations. What are companies and organizations doing well? What do they need to improve on? How can they improve? This activity can be particularly meaningful if it is framed as an exercise where all of the recommendations will be sent to the company/organization after the group work and presentation are complete.
- **Debate exercise** - organize participants into a debate-style activity where one side takes the position that social media use is not creating an impact while the other side takes the position that social media use does create an impact. Have both sides of the debate research their topic and prepare for a formal debate atmosphere to present their position.
- **Taking-a-position exercise** - choose a social media post about impacts to the outdoors that includes comments from both the “yes, it’s causing an impact” people and the “no, it’s not causing an impact” people. You’ll want to carefully choose a post and vet the comments to make sure that you are comfortable with all of the content and language on the page.

\*Technology and social media uses within certain programs may be bound by policies and protocols set up by the organizations. Be sure that any activity used to engage youth participants follows the guidelines set forth by your organization.

## OTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES

[Digital Citizenship & Social and Emotional Learning](#) - Common Sense Education  
[What is media literacy, and why is it important?](#) - Common Sense Media  
[Social Media for Teachers: Guides, Resource, and Ideas](#) - Edutopia

## POWERPOINT DECK

The PowerPoint file [can be found here](#). This short PowerPoint includes photos posted to social media. The first half of the photos represent potential negative impacts, while the final two photos from Glacier National Park are examples of ways that social media can be positively used for minimizing impacts. These photo examples may be a good way to help frame the social media discussion with youth.



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