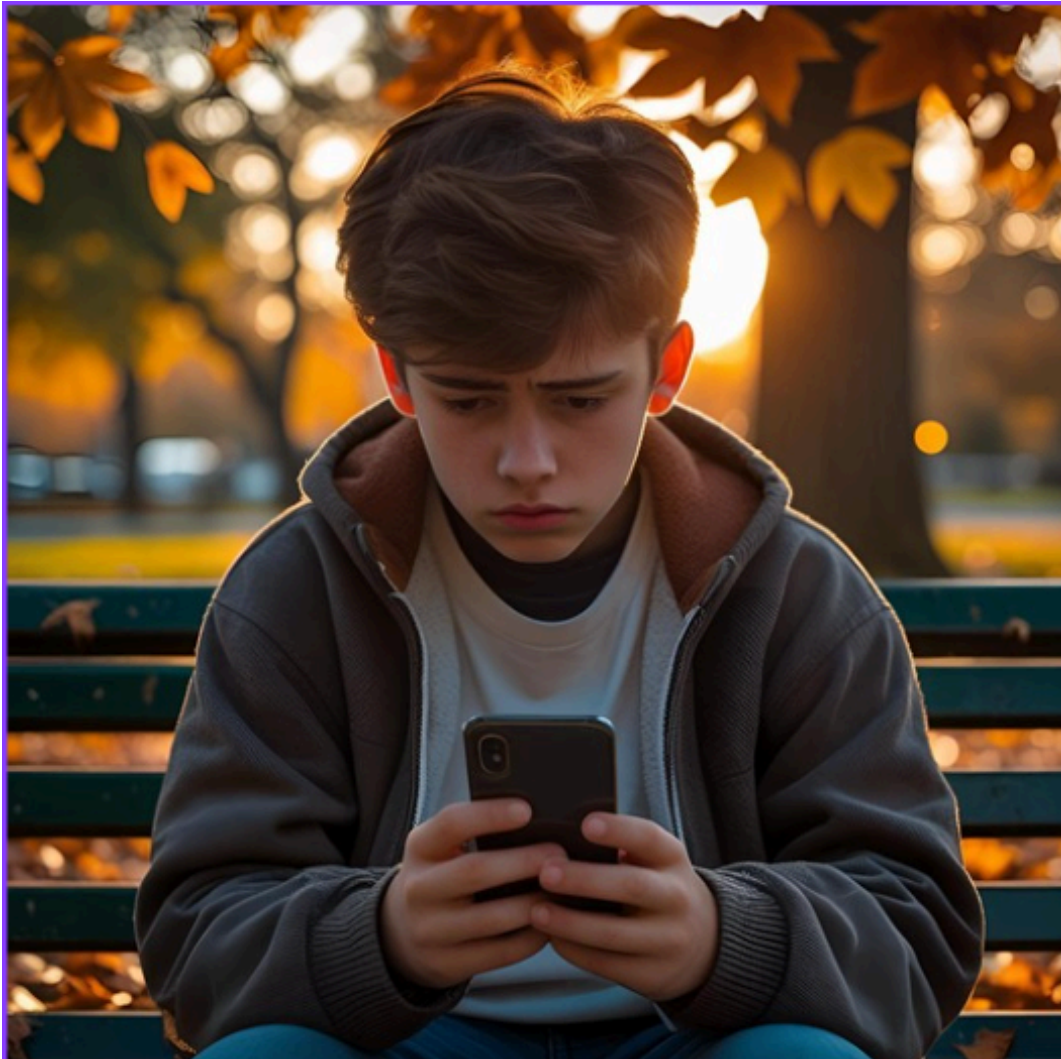# Anxiety and the passage of time

Below is a blog post from a series I wrote for Amelia VR, a virtual reality mental health startup, in 2022. The startup has since rebranded and the content is no longer online, and is showcased here for archival and portfolio purposes.

Two years after Covid-19 first spread across the world, most of us are now trying to get our lives back to normal. And we're in search of lost time.

Young people may be worried that they've missed out on important milestones of their formative years.

Others might find themselves struggling to pick up where they left off. According to one [study](#), almost 60% of teenage girls met the criteria for depression or an anxiety disorder during the Covid-19 pandemic. Loneliness [strongly correlates](#) with depression and social anxiety in youth, and after a lengthy period of isolation teenagers may struggle to readapt to school or have difficulty making new friends.

The uneasy feeling that one may have fallen behind isn't limited to adolescents. More than [one-third of adults in the US](#) suffered from anxiety, depression, or both during the pandemic, and for many these disorders continue to linger. There's no doubt that anxiety and depression can make it more difficult - and sometimes downright impossible - to advance in life. Adults who haven't yet met their personal or professional goals may feel they've fallen further behind because of the pandemic, and now have less time for their career to take off or to meet the right partner. The clock is ticking!

Still losing time: the role of social media & FOMO in mental health

All of us missed out on experiences during the pandemic, and there are no universal rules for what you should have accomplished by a certain age. We're all in more or less the same boat - though you wouldn't know it if you were scrolling through Instagram. FOMO (fear of missing out) didn't go away while we were on lockdown, even if photos of tropical beaches were replaced with those of baked goods.

FOMO is "[a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent](#)." The phenomenon has been connected with anxiety, depression, a decrease in motivation, and social media addiction.

This means that those who fear they've fallen behind may spend even more time online - meaning, of course, that they're continuing to miss out.

While pandemic restrictions may have lifted, social isolation hasn't. Multiple [studies](#) have found that heavy social media use corresponds with declines in well-being.

Pandemic or not, people who spend the most time on social media are over three times more likely to suffer from "[Perceived Social Isolation](#)" than those who use it for only 30 minutes a day.

When we use social media we compare ourselves to others, which can lead to negative self-appraisal and low self-esteem - key characteristics of depression and social anxiety. This social comparison can reinforce a feeling that we're behind our peers. In the wake of the pandemic, this can leave people already afflicted by a mental health disorder feeling even more forlorn, and prevent them from living in the moment.

How can we recover time lost and return to the present?

What can we do when people lament having lost a part of their lives, especially when anxiety, depression, low self-esteem or unhealthy habits prevent them from recovering it?

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Reappraisal

   Reappraisal, an emotional regulation technique commonly used in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), involves the reframing of a negative thought or situation.

   For example, you could ask the patient what they've learned about themselves after spending two years isolated in a global pandemic.

   Did they learn any new skills, or discover new interests or hobbies? How have they grown from the experience? Hearing the stories of others who have found wisdom through adversity can serve as useful examples here.

With dozens of programs utilizing CBT, Amelia Virtual Care's VR technology can assist you and your clients in challenging and reassessing negative thought patterns about themselves and their experiences.

2. Virtual exposure therapy

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is the most common type of anxiety disorder, and its typical onset is in adolescence. If your patient has developed social phobia or it has worsened due to the pandemic, VR can definitely help.

The treatment protocol for SAD is exposure therapy - gradual exposure to social situations - along with social skills training. Studies have found that VR exposure therapy is [just as effective](#) as in person exposure therapy for individuals with SAD (and a lot easier and more cost effective). Amelia Virtual Care's selection of VR environments includes simulations of social situations for exposure therapy, which you as the therapist can adjust to the needs of your patient.

3. Mindfulness-based interventions

For those ruminating over lost time, mindfulness is a great way to bring them back into the present moment. Mindfulness-based techniques are increasingly being used in psychotherapy and integrated into existing interventions like CBT.

By learning to keep our attention on the here and now, and non-judgmentally observing our thoughts, feelings, and environment, we achieve mindfulness and a state of acceptance. Mindfulness-based interventions enhance emotional regulation, goal-oriented behavior, and cognitive flexibility. Recent [studies](#) have found them to be as if not more effective as existing

interventions in treating anxiety and depression.

With [Amelia Virtual Care](#), you can bring your clients to virtual environments built to foster mindfulness from the comfort of their homes. Amelia's mindfulness VR environments include breathing exercises, guided visualizations, body scanning, immersive experiences for practicing emotional regulation, and more.