

“Where can you find true happiness?”

In our busy lives, even the things we love can sometimes feel exhausting. At such times, many of us turn to social media. With just a tap, we can enter another world. We get absorbed in our phone screens and don't look around. In the U.S., a study of 4,000 young people showed that one in seven uses social media more than six hours a day. Children between 11 and 14 spend about nine hours daily on screens. These numbers show how much social media has invaded our lives. At first, social media may feel like a happy dream. But behind that dream lies a dangerous side—cyberbullying, hate, addiction, and pressure that can lead to depression or even the loss of life.

I also had a frightening experience. I used to admire influencers and models online. I compared my body to theirs and felt disappointed with myself. In 6th grade, I started an extreme diet. I loved eating. But the thought, “I must lose weight,” made me fear food. I felt happy when my weight dropped, so the voices of concern around me didn't reach me at all. During that time, I often skipped swimming practice. At a competition, I failed and was harshly scolded by my father. He said, “Where can you find true happiness?” His words finally woke me up. I realized how much I had lost—my health, my time, my love for swimming, and precious moments with my family. My family and friends stayed by my side until I regained my strength. When I finally realized people's warmth and kindness again, tears began to flow and wouldn't stop.

In November 2024, I read that Australia passed a law banning social media for people under 16. This came after many children were harmed, and some lost their lives. One story was about a 14-year-old boy who died after struggling with an eating disorder. The boy's mother helped push for that law. I thought, “That could have been me and my parents.” At the time, Japanese kids and their parents seemed more relaxed, and so it is even now. But in 2023 alone, over 1,700 children in Japan were involved in social media-related crimes. This is our problem too. The Australian law is a message from grieving parents—a wish to protect all teenagers.

Now, I know there is a better world beyond the world of screens. Real conversations with family and friends. Real warm voices from the people who are by your side. As long as we remember that we belong in the real world—not just online—we will be safe. Our teenage years are sensitive and fragile, but also full of energy. If we spend them with real people, and real experiences, we will find the real happiness that exists in the real world. Now here is the place where I can find my true happiness. Where can you find your true happiness?

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