

# Give GLUP THE Ghost

*We're all guilty of a little online stalking – but it's about time we stop following our former friends, says Niamh Devereux*

**H**ands up who remembers Vitamin C's hit Graduation (Friends Forever)? Of course you do. Choon. However that little ditty we all sang with her our gal pals on the last day of school had a fatal flaw; it convinced us that no matter what happens in life, we'll always stay friends with the people we grew up with.

Which, as lovely as it sounds, is sadly not always reality. In reality, life gets in the way. We get into relationships, start careers, plan travels and sometimes, unfortunately, friendships can crumble away. Whether it ends in a painful fall out or the torturous slow burn of gradually drifting apart, it's devastating. And while we hear about break up advice when it comes to parting ways with our fellas, we don't often talk about breaking up with a friend even though it can have huge repercussions on our mental and physical health.

Even if you were the one to do the dumping, it still hurts like hell. And, with an added twist, living in this digital era can just add salt to that wound. Before the explosion of social media, if our friend turned into an ex, we could try and move on from it all with the mantra of 'ignorance is bliss'. Sure, we might bump into them when we're back home for Christmas, or hear an update on them during a phone call with mammy, but it's a bearable blast from the past; small doses and all that.

Now though, we have Facebook to contend with. And Twitter. And Snapchat. And...you get the drill. So these days, this person that is no longer still in your life is, well, still in your life. You can see where they're hanging out, who they're dating, what their new haircut looks like and even what they're having for lunch. Worst of all, you can keep tabs on who's replaced you for best friend duties; the person who's now going on the brunch dates or for Saturday night G&Ts.

Sarah, 31, tells us that her online stalking of a former friend turned into self-confessed

torture. "We were basically like sisters growing up," she says. "Over time, after we left school for college, things went sour. One day we had an argument about her not making effort and that was it – we stopped speaking.

"I pretended like I didn't care but seeing all her photos online killed me. She looked so happy in them all and it felt like I was the only one who cared. I don't know why, but I couldn't look away."

So why don't we look away? Why is it so hard to digitally remove someone from our lives after it's happened IRL?

According to Irene S. Levine, PhD, psychologist and producer of [TheFriendshipBlog.com](http://TheFriendshipBlog.com), whatever the reason we do it for, whether it's a refusal to let go or morbid curiosity, we need to stop haunting our ex pals – for the sake of our health.

"One-sided friendships, whether real or virtual, are rarely satisfying," she says. "If your curiosity about your once-friend approaches stalking, it isn't a healthy habit to pursue. And if the relationship ended acrimoniously, this isn't a way of achieving closure. Instead, you are allowing the relationship to continue to gnaw at you.

"The rules for following friends on social media shouldn't be too different than the rules you would follow in real life. Just because you can lurk anonymously and follow someone, doesn't mean you should," Irene says.

"If you are so absorbed by old friends that you can't help yourself, you might need to take a hiatus from social media and/or speak to a professional about what's missing from your life now."

When it comes down to it, peering into a virtual window of a person's life, whether it's someone you miss or resent, is never going to benefit you. Period. Friendship expert Dana Kerford, also a teacher to young kids, reckons we can learn some life lessons from her young students.

"We use a visual tool called the friend-o-meter. It helps us think about whether a

friendship is healthy or unhealthy and we compare it to food. Why do we eat healthy food? How does it make us feel?" she says.

"Friendships are the same. Unhealthy friendships, like unhealthy food, make us feel bad. They drag us down. In this day and age, where relationships also exist online, we should apply the same logic."

Dana adds: "If it's an unhealthy friendship, then decreasing the daily dose of this relationship also includes viewing pictures on Instagram, following Snapchats, and reading daily posts on Facebook. Whether in person or online, it's important we surround ourselves with people who make us feel good."

If you're struggling to press the unfollow button, perhaps it's time to stop overthinking and take the plunge. What's really stopping you? You're worried they'll notice? Quite frankly: who cares? If they are no longer in your life, and notice that you've unfriended them, then chances are their mutual fascination with you is an issue for them, and you've done them a favour.

And if you don't want to erase years of memories? There's an app for that; FFForget allows people to back up all their content from the social networks they use and keep them in a safe, encrypted container.

So in reality, there's really nothing stopping you for taking back charge. It's time to stop making excuses and to take a leaf from author Sarah Knight, from the glorious book *The Life-Changing Magic of Not Giving a F\*ck*, who employs the 'NotSorry' method. Basically, it has two steps: Deciding what you don't give a f\*ck about 2. Not giving a f\*ck about those things. Amen, sister.



*Muahaha, at least I have more Instagram followers than her*

