

Sydney teenagers on 'struggle street' after giving up Facebook to learn about self control

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Clockwise from left is Brearna Leopold, 14, Shane Hustwayte, 11, Tom Perkins, 16, and Brittany Ryan, 15. They are participating in a challenge to abstain from using Facebook and social media for 12 weeks. *Photo: Tamara Dean*

"100 pushups now".

Someone in Rose Smith's martial arts class has broken the rules and the whole group is being punished.

For six weeks 20 teenagers from Sydney's northern beaches have vowed to give up their vices - mobile phones at night, violent movies and video games, swearing, and the ultimate test - social media.

"Those of you who cannot stay off Facebook we thank you for the push ups we are about to do," barks their instructor.

Smith's "red belt challenge" is designed to test her student's self control, no small feat considering the social environment of most teens was defined by the instant gratification of social media, the constant buzz of gadgets and the fear of missing out (which even has its own acronym - FOMO).

A week into the challenge, Tom Perkins, 16, admits he is on "struggle street" trying to keep off the social networking site Facebook.

"It's how I communicate with my friends, I always have it on in the background," said the year 11 student and black belt hopeful from St. Augustine's College, Brookvale.

Smith knows when someone has transgressed because her assistant is Facebook's friends with all the students.

But most students will do themselves in, she said.

The group punishment encouraged the students to consider how their actions could affect others.

"By giving up these things we are not trying to control them, we are asking them to control themselves," said sensei Smith, the head of hohshin - a type of martial arts - in the Australia Pacific region.

Another student, Brittany Ryan, 15, has found it easy to log off Facebook; action movies were harder to resist.

But her will has not faltered so far.

"It shows you that if you decide you want to do something you can do it."

While self discipline was a major part of being a successful hohshin martial artist, it was also a skill Smith believed would help build her student's self esteem and confidence and protect them from bullies.

"I hope that through the challenge they gain a mastery over themselves and a deeper understanding of their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours," said sensei Smith, who has given up coffee for the challenge.

She says it is important her students developed their own sense of self worth, rather than take satisfaction from the number of friend's who like or comment on their Facebook profile.

"If your brain rewards you with good feelings every time you get a like on Facebook that's a pretty precarious way to build your self esteem," she said.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/hometech/sydney-teenagers-on-struggle-street-after-giving-up-facebook-to-learn-about-self-control-20120330-1w2mk.html#ixzz20s6gikTp>