



# REALITY

# SHIFTING



**ESCAPISM GONE TOO FAR?**

A VOICEBOX REPORT

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## About Us

At VoiceBox, we work hard to amplify the voices of young people around the world. We believe it is important to listen to and facilitate the debates young people are having – even when the topic is a difficult one. Our content platform provides a space for young people to talk about subjects that matter to them; from lighthearted trends to more serious issues.

Find out more about VoiceBox:

**[www.voicebox.site](http://www.voicebox.site)**

## Methodology

This report covers our findings from a deep dive into ‘reality shifting’ – a trend that has become increasingly popular among young people. Our findings are based on discussions with our network of international ambassadors and online research through TikTok and opinion-gathering platforms such as Reddit and Twitter. We also conducted a literature review that was inevitably limited given the newness of the issue. We are grateful for those who took part in this research.

All statements from young people have been anonymised to protect the identity of those involved.

***Please note: this report includes sensitive topics that some people might find difficult. Please visit our [Resources Page](#) for help.***

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# Introduction

In his final research paper<sup>1</sup>, Professor Stephen Hawking predicted something near-impossible to prove: that the universe we inhabit is, in fact, one of many. As mind blowing as that seems, the opportunity to explore new realms has never been entirely out of the question. This is because humanity has been blessed with something extraordinary: the capacity to imagine, explore, and wonder. But some internet-goers are claiming that they can do a lot more than envision other worlds: they claim to literally 'visit' them.

**'Reality shifting'** is a meditation-esque practice where people believe they can genuinely transcend or 'shift' their consciousness into other realities. It has a significant distinction from daydreaming; as daydreaming would suggest that, regardless how realistic they feel, dreams are still a figment of the imagination. Reality shifting exploded during the pandemic – with a TikTok community known as 'shifftok' using the platform to share experiences, tips, and fictional locations. At the time of writing, the TikTok hashtag #realityshifting had 2.1B views.

Slightly odd online trends aren't new or unusual. VoiceBox has previously investigated Munchausen by Internet, a term coined for when a person portrays health problems (mental or physical) online that they do not have – going as far to develop psychosomatic symptoms that amplify their imagined diagnosis. Our investigative report discovered that young people were using Munchausen by Internet as an outlet for community-building and escapism, a theme that recurs in reality shifting communities. Afterall, why bother with real life when you can frequent your own dream world?





# Context

Reality shifters have their own set of terms to describe common experiences and occurrences:

- Any '**current reality**' is abbreviated to 'CR' (interchangeable with 'original reality'), and any '**desired reality**' (meaning the reality one would like to shift to) is abbreviated to 'DR'.
- Shifters might have a close bond with a person(s) in their desired reality known as a '**comfort character**'. These are commonly based on pre-existing fictional characters such as Draco Malfoy from Harry Potter, although they can also be original characters.
- '**Script**' refers to the templates created for visualising a desired reality and what happens in it – typically written down on paper. It may include details about what the setting and characters look like, sounds or smells present and how the passage of time differs between the current reality and the desired reality. This is often recommended to beginners for extra support.
- Shifters will often include a '**safe word**' in their script which can be used to quickly return to the current reality if needed.



There are also commonly suggested methods and techniques to induce shifting:

- **Meditation** before shifting to 'prepare the mind'.
- **Affirmations**: the repetition of phrases in the mind or out loud such as "I am shifting", or, "I am in my desired reality".
- **Subliminals**: a stimuli containing affirmations that promote visualisation of the desired reality, sometimes layered with ambient noise. These are commonly found on YouTube.
- **The Raven Method**: spreading out in a starfish position (either on a bed or flat surface) and counting to 100. Subliminals are usually played in the background and the individual will recite affirmations between counting numbers.<sup>2</sup>
- **The Pillow Method**: scripting a desired reality on a piece of paper and reading it several times. The script will then be placed under a pillow to fill the subconscious with details about the desired reality before going to sleep.<sup>2</sup>
- **The Alice in Wonderland Method**: envisioning sitting against a tree until someone from the desired reality runs past. The individual will chase that character until falling 'down the rabbit hole' and finding a key to the desired reality.<sup>2</sup>
- **The Elevator Method**: envisioning travelling upwards in an elevator. The elevator doors will supposedly open on the top floor to reveal the individual's desired reality.<sup>2</sup>



# What Happens?

So what is actually happening? Is shifting 'real'? While there is of course no evidence of literally transferring one's consciousness into the body of another being from a different dimension, some experts have suggested that shifting could be a combination of self-hypnosis, lucid dreaming and dissociation.<sup>2</sup> Whatever it is, many young people are taking to TikTok and Reddit to share their experiences.

*"I ended up waking up in a completely new world and at first I was in shock and couldn't believe what I was seeing and after the shock subsided my whole view on realities and myself was completely flipped upside down it was just so mind blowing to me I could barely even fathom what I was experiencing with my senses."*

*"I'm currently trying to shift to Euphoria, Shameless, Harry Potter, That 70's Show, Modern Family, and several different fame DRs [desired realities]."*

*"The first day in my Hogwarts DR me and Draco went to Hogsmeade, got butterbeers, stole candy from Honeydukes, had a snowball fight and then had a mini sleepover in the common room that night (he also let me put a face mask on him lol)."*

*"I instantly felt my surroundings change. Not like me going anywhere but my whole room shapeshifting instantly. I opened my eyes and omg when i tell you- everything was the exact way i imagined it to be. I only had a vague image of my spaceship in my mind but this was, like a finished version of it, with details I never thought of."*

*"I woke up, and right away I looked at myself, and I had PAWS. this was my first time shifting as a full animal, so i didn't know what to expect. I was so excited."*

*"I can't even describe it properly because it was just, unbelievable. It sunk to me like, 'dude, I am in space right now. I am in f\*cking space right now'. Right after that, I don't know why but I decided to come back. All I did was close my eyes and make the intention that I would be back here in bed, and the next thing I knew I was."*

*"About 6 and a halfish months have gone by for me in the Marvel Universe, but here only 5 days have gone by. Feels weird."*

*"Guys! I shifted to my Wednesday Universe DR last night! I spent about two weeks there and Wednesday and I became best friends. It was amazing!"*



It's not uncommon for people to spend months, or even years, trying to shift before finding 'success'.

*"I've been trying for 6 months and still haven't shifted but been close! Still not giving up! You will shift if you haven't already, don't give up!"*

*"How have I still not shifted after 2.5 years? Haven't I done enough?!"*

*"I dedicated a full week to go all out, bootcamp style and shift. All I would do is meditate and do techniques. I would meditate 3 times a day, in the morning, afternoon, and before bed. I was writing 3 pages of affirmations daily. I was listening to subliminals non-stop."*

*"Guys I FINALLY shifted today after 2 years of failed attempts!"*

Once someone has 'successfully' shifted, they are usually overjoyed.

*"I just shifted to my DR and it was the best experience I've ever had in my life!"*

*"It's 4:48am and I just shifted. I was in HP DR [Harry Potter dream reality] for a week. Why am I crying this hard? So many emotions to process I guess?!"*

*"I finally shifted to my dream reality and finally felt at home. I'm so happy!"*

But while some people enjoy shifting to extravagant, fictional places for fun; others prefer to escape where they feel accepted.

*"I just want to shift somewhere where my crush likes me and I have good friends. How am I supposed to start?"*

*"I wish I could shift to a reality exactly like this one but where my trauma never happened and I could just be happy."*

*"It wasn't anything big, just a shift to a reality where I have a better relationship with my parents."*

# Why Be Concerned?

Shifting to create a 'perfect' reality is concerning. We are worried that young people are neglecting responsibility and ignoring tricky emotions by choosing to 'escape' instead. Some might be at risk of developing an unrealistic expectation of their current life, particularly within friendships and romantic relationships. Young people need practical support from friends, family and other resources like youth clubs and school or university counselling. Ideally, medically trained professionals should also be accessible and present to help manage mental health, rather than a reliance on social media echo chambers and a potentially risky method of avoiding problems.<sup>3</sup>

*"I have really bad anxiety and depression and I was using shifting as an escape from that... I ended up skipping school to go and shift."*

*"Shifting is literally the solution to everything. Bad grades? Shift. Insecure? Shift. Sh\*tty family? Shift. Not enough friends? Shift. Bored of this reality? Shift. Hungry? Shift. Tired? Shift. When in doubt, shift it out."*

*"I'm tired, exhausted and all I want to do is shift, I want to go home, I want to see my friends and family [in my DR], I want to be happy."*

*"Things don't feel real anymore."*

*"Sometimes I try to tell myself that I'm not that hard to love, but then I remember that I have to shift realities in order to find love."*

Reality shifters as a community should not be alienated and we certainly don't want to suggest any deliberate harm is being caused. Everyone needs to escape from the stresses of life sometimes in order to avoid burnout. If shifters enjoy exploring their favourite fictional locations and sharing their experience online, there is little reason to criticise them for it. But for some, it is taken too far. We are worried about the number of young people who are being encouraged to disassociate without thinking of, or being educated on, the consequences of ignoring issues in their 'original reality'. This could have a disastrous effect on mental health, particularly when the practice of reality shifting is so glamorised.

*"Shifting is a bit of a paradoxical ground for mental health, in one way it's a way to escape reality but on the other hand it's very toxic to you over a longer time; a slow acting poison per se. The idea of spending a lifetime in another world / the idea of being able to live forever is disturbing. Living through all of existence and then deciding to forget everything because existence started to become boring is what would probably come of it."*



Young people are developing such intense attachments to their desired reality that it causes distress to be present in their current life. We've found cases of people shifting into a version of themselves much older than their true age, and comfort characters becoming so emotionally soothing that the 'real world' felt wrong when they woke up. Those who have children in their desired reality appear to be particularly distressed, likely due to feeling as though they have 'abandoned' their family when they return to current life.

*"I'm so f\*cking depressed that I have to leave my children and husband behind. I can feel them missing me. Every second in this reality feels like too much."*

*"I always miss them, every time I open my eyes and they aren't there it kills me."*

We also observed instances of jealousy between people in a 'relationship' with the same comfort character from fictional worlds. But other shifters try to help defuse heated exchanges by reminding those arguing of the fundamentals of reality shifting: that each person experiences unique realities and therefore no 'cheating' has occurred.

*"I know it's easy to get jealous that other people may be shifting for the same [comfort character] that you're shifting for but THEY'RE DIFFERENT PEOPLE... There's no reason to get jealous, there's no reason to get defensive because it's not the same person! That person in someone else's DR doesn't even know you exist. Your person knows that you exist and loves you regardless."*

Some shifters take their journey even further by supposedly '**permashifting**'; a practice where a person leaves their current reality with no plans of returning. A 'clone' continues with life in their current reality, while the 'real' person escapes permanently.

*"Reality shifting can be permanent if you want it to be... it's basically just shifting and choosing to never return."*

*"I've decided that I'm gonna permashift. I've finally reached my breaking point and I can't stand another day in my CR [current reality]."*

*"Will my CR [current reality] self still be alive and act like me?"*

*"I just want to be there [desired reality] forever."*

Worryingly, permashifting seems to be praised by many in the community without acknowledging why the vulnerable want to leave their current life. Some individuals are clearly struggling, but community members continue to give unrealistic reassurance which could potentially tempt others into 'disappearing' forever.

*"There are infinite realities, so infinite possibilities. You can do whatever you want to do."*

*"Wish you the best of luck on your permashifting journey."*

*"I'm telling you this. If you don't want to come back, you're not going to."*

*"Do what you need to do."*

**'Respawning'** is a subset of permashifting where people 'let go' of their physical body through 'forced reincarnation'. Some believe respawning provides the chance to completely start again in a desired reality – free from any pull towards the current reality left behind. While some claim that your body doesn't have to die to respawn because it can be 'cloned', others reference 'manifesting' the body towards a clinical death (such as a heart attack). It seems most of the reality shifting community don't support respawning, but there have been observations of support towards those who are tempted to try this potentially dangerous practice.

*"The 'clone' will disappear along with every trace of them and their parents will just forget they existed."*

*"Warning: When you respawn into your DR you will not be able to ever go back to your CR. You will forget about your CR. The reality you respawn to after you leave your body will become your CR."*

*"Please don't try to respawn, it's a very dangerous practice."*

*"Everyone is free to experience other realities as they please."*

*"There's no reason to not recommend respawning just because you yourself don't have a reason to do it, there is nothing wrong with it and isn't dangerous at all cmon now."*

*"That escapism leads to more anger/depression, which leads to more escapism. It's a terrible cycle."*



# Conclusion

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Using the internet to discover outlets for nurturing mental health can be extremely beneficial, and we welcome methods of support that connect people to each other and provide a channel of focus. Our concern about reality shifting is the way it can be utilised for harmful escapism that impacts mental health and relationships. Lack of primary mental health care is leaving young people at crisis point, and early intervention support such as youth clubs should be acknowledged by decision makers as an essential resource that removes pressure from hospital outpatient services. This will require a review of mental health policies from governing bodies worldwide and a community-based approach to nurturing mental health before small issues turn into big ones. We also implore mental health professionals to listen to what young people have to say about this emerging trend.

If you have any questions for us please reach out at [info@voicebox.site](mailto:info@voicebox.site)



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