

Social Media and Mental Health

Impacts on Our Children



A Year Like No Other

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the mental health of the nation. Previous disasters in the United States affected specific regions or populations. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone in the country, including children.

Children may be particularly overwhelmed when stress is connected to a traumatic event—like a natural disaster or pandemic. Grieving the losses and drastic changes in their lives resulting from these events is natural. However, grief can cause children to experience significant changes in their sleep patterns, to isolate themselves more, or to engage more frequently with social media. This increased use of social media can be both beneficial and problematic.

A March 2020 “Parenting Children in the Age of Screens” survey done by the Pew Research Center revealed that two-thirds of parents feel that parenting is harder today than it was 20 years ago. Technologies, including social media, smart phones, and other device distractions are cited as some of the reasons. <http://www.pewresearch.org>

Children and teens are very peer-focused under ordinary circumstances and rely on social connections, many of which have been limited by the pandemic. Remote school and the cancellation of many group activities can cause them to feel isolated from their peer groups. It is important that they practice **physical** distancing, but not necessarily **social** distancing.

With children spending more time online, parents may worry about their increased use of technology in general and social media in particular, including the effect it may have on their children. Thankfully, the news is not all bad. This newsletter will explore the most current research on social media, mental health concerns, and how one may affect the other.



PREVENTION SERVICES

IN THIS ISSUE

Introduction	1
Social Media	2
Possible Negative Effects	2
Balancing Social Media	3
Mental Health	4
What to Look For	4
Talking About It	5
Facts and Stats	5
Additional Resources	6

Social Media

Social media is defined as any website or application (app) that enables users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

Because social media is relatively new, the verdict is still out on whether it is harmful to the mental health of teens. According to engage.youth.gov, there are many benefits to using social media, including social support, connecting with others in a meaningful way, and seeking out information. But while there are many positives to social media use, there can also be negative experiences, such as cyberbullying, harassment, and feelings of inadequacy which result from comparing their life to the “online life” of others.

The good news is that although almost half of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 say they are on the Internet almost constantly and more than 90% are social media users, this does not mean that they lack face-to-face socialization. These highly plugged-in youth are just as likely as their less-connected peers to socialize regularly with their friends in person, according to the Pew Research Center survey. In fact, when considering both online and offline interactions, highly online-connected teens report more contact with their friends compared with other teens.

Can It Be Addictive for Teens?

For many teens, social media can become almost addictive. Researchers at the UCLA Brain Mapping Center found that the reward region of teen brains became activated by “likes” on social media, sometimes causing them to want to use social media more. This region of the brain is particularly sensitive during the teen years, which could explain why teens are so drawn to social media.



Possible Negative Impacts

Undoubtedly, social networking plays a vital role in broadening teen social connections and helping them learn valuable technical skills. But what impact is all of this social networking having on young teen minds? As per **Common Sense Media**, most reports indicate that the impact can be significant.

- Prolonged use of social media may be related to the signs and symptoms of depression as well as low self-esteem, especially in children.
- It takes a lot of time and effort to keep up with the unspoken rules and culture of each social media platform. As a result, this puts additional pressure on teens, which can cause feelings of anxiety.
- Teens need more sleep than adults do, but they often struggle to disengage from social media because they don't want to miss out. This can deprive them of sleep and be detrimental to their physical health.

Furthermore, it is easy for a teen to start thinking that everyone is happier or better off than they are. This “compare and despair” can lead to depression, loneliness, anger, and a variety of other issues, including envy, which if not dealt with, often leads to bullying and mean behavior. <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

Social media is a daily part of life for the vast majority of American teens. A **Pew Research Center** survey found the following:

- **75%** of American teenagers have social media profiles
- **51%** of teens visit social networking sites on a daily basis
- **67%** of teens have their own smartphone

Helping Your Child Balance Social Media Usage

Encourage your child to:

- **Take breaks.** Take breaks from social media, which could include deactivating social media accounts.
- **Turn off notifications.** Cut down on distractions by keeping apps on silent or turning off app notifications.
- **Unfriend, unfollow, mute.** Have them remove people who do not show them respect or make them feel good about themselves.
- **Track screen time.** Encourage your teen to keep track of how much time they spend on their phone and social media. Ironically, there are apps to help them do this!
- **Keep a balanced perspective.** Balance how much time they spend online with time seeing their friends in person, engaging in activities, and being social in real life.

Parental Awareness

Even though nearly all social networking sites require children to be 13 or older to create a profile, many younger children are joining social networking sites every day, often without their parents' knowledge or approval. Here are some suggestions to help parents be more aware of their child's online activities.

- Put the computer in a centralized area, such as the kitchen.
- Utilize parental monitoring software.
- Have regular discussions on how to use social media responsibly and safely.

When families navigate the world of social media together, a child's online world becomes much safer and more manageable.

Teen Attitudes About Social Media

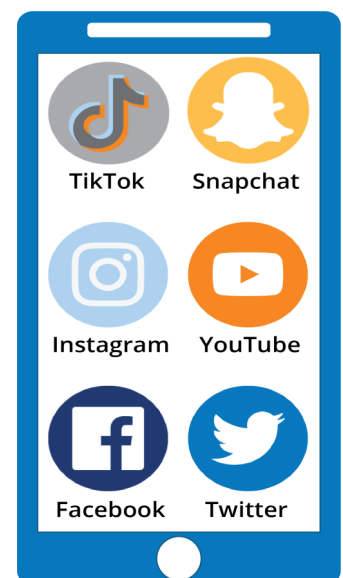
Social media makes them feel more connected to what is going on in their friends' lives **81%**

Associates their social media use with feeling included rather than excluded **71%**

Associates their social media use with feeling confident, rather than insecure **69%**

Have been supported on social media through challenges and tough times **68%**

Most Popular Apps For Teens



The State of Youth Mental Health

The 2020 Mental Health in America Youth Data Report indicates that youth mental health is worsening. Almost 10% of youth in the United States have severe major depression, and 59% of youth with major depression do not receive any mental health treatment. If left untreated, childhood depression is likely to persist into adulthood.

Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital reported that from April through November of 2020, there was a 35% increase in children who needed mental health assistance compared to 2019.

Half of all people with mental health disorders show signs before the age of 14, and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24. Unfortunately, less than 20% of children and adolescents with diagnosable mental health problems receive the treatment they need. Children with mental health concerns can benefit from early intervention.

mentalhealth.gov



Adolescents with mental health conditions are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, educational difficulties, risk-taking behaviors, health problems, human rights violations, discrimination, and stigma (which affects willingness to seek help). [World Health Organization](http://WorldHealthOrganization)

What to Look For

Knowing when your child needs help and what to do is critical. Consult with a health care professional if your child shows one or more of the following behaviors:

- Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason
- Trying to harm or kill themselves or making plans to do so
- Not eating, throwing up, or using laxatives to lose weight
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Severe out-of-control risk-taking behavior that can hurt themselves or others
- Repeated use of drugs or alcohol
- Drastic changes in behavior, personality, or sleep habits
- Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still

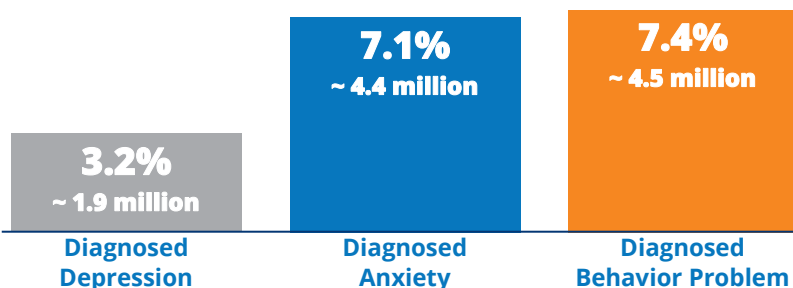
Suicide is the leading cause of death for adolescents age 15-19. CDC.gov

Challenges Children May Now Face

Some of the new challenges children and young people face due to the COVID-19 pandemic relate to:

- **Changes in their routines** (having to physically distance from family, friends, worship community)
- **Breaks in continuity of learning** (virtual learning environments, technology access, and connectivity issues)
- **Breaks in continuity of health care** (missed well-child and immunization visits, limited access to mental, speech, and occupational health services)
- **Missed significant life events** (grief of missing celebrations, vacations, or other milestone life events)
- **Lost security and safety** (housing and food insecurity, increased exposure to violence and online harm, threat of physical illness, and uncertainty for the future)

Depression, Anxiety, and Behavior Disorders in US Children 3-17 years - cdc.gov





The exact cause of most mental health disorders is not known, but research suggests that a combination of factors, including heredity, biology, psychological trauma, and environmental stress might be involved.

Suggestions for starting a conversation with your child about mental health:

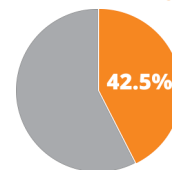
- Can you tell me more about what is happening? How are you feeling?
- Have you had feelings like this in the past?
- Sometimes you need to talk to an adult about your feelings. I'm here to listen. How can I help you feel better?
- Do you feel like you want to talk to someone else about your problem?
- I'm worried about your safety. Can you tell me if you have thoughts about harming yourself or others?

When talking about mental health problems with your child you should:

- Communicate in a straightforward manner
- Speak at a level that is appropriate to a child or adolescent's age and developmental level (preschool children need fewer details than teenagers)
- Discuss the topic when your child feels safe and comfortable
- Watch for reactions during the discussion and slow down or back up if your child becomes confused or looks upset
- Listen openly and let your child tell you about his or her feelings and worries

mentalhealth.gov

2020 Florida Youth Survey Lee County



42.5% of Lee County middle and high school students reported feeling depressed or sad MOST days during the past year.



1 in 5 youth will experience a mental health challenge at some point during their life.

If your child is having suicidal thoughts, The Center for Progress and Excellence Mobile Crisis Response Team is a free local resource. The MCRT is on call 24/7, including holidays.
1-844-395-4432

If you or a loved one are in immediate danger, call
911.

Another resource is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at
1-800-273-8255

Four out of five people who die by suicide give clear warning signs of their intentions. If we learn the signs and know how to respond, we have the opportunity to assist 80% of teens who are contemplating suicide.

A Word About Suicide Risk

Rates of suicide for both youth and adults increase during times of high stress. Not everyone who considers killing themselves will talk about it; however, any talk by anyone regarding killing themselves should be taken seriously. If you are worried about your child, it is critical to support them and safeguard your home by securing any potential weapons and medications, and by seeking professional help.

Prevention Services Social Media Video Series

To view these videos, visit our Social Media Awareness web page at:

<https://www.leeschools.net/student-support/prevention/social-media-awareness>



Part 1:
Discusses popular apps for teens and social media.



Part 2:
Discusses online risks your child may be exposed to.



Part 3:
Discusses cyberbullying and its impact on youth.



youth.gov

This tip sheet is to help adults who work with youth that are active on social media.

https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/Tip%20Sheet%20on%20Social%20Media%20Use%20-%20For%20Adults_0.pdf



CDC COVID-19 Parental Resource Kit: Ensuring Children and Young People's Social, Emotional, and Mental Well-being

The CDC developed this online kit to help support parents, caregivers, and other adults serving children and young people to ensure their well-being.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/parental-resource-kit/index.html>

Comprehensive CDC web page on children and mental health:

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/index.html>



MAY 6th, 2021 IS: NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day seeks to raise awareness about the importance of children's mental health and show that positive mental health is essential to a child's healthy development. <https://www.samhsa.gov/childrens-awareness-day>



Common Sense Media's website offers the latest research and guidance on social media for parents with children age two years and older.

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/social-media>



healthychildren.org
Powered by pediatricians. Trusted by parents.
from the American Academy of Pediatrics

The web page, **Mental Health During COVID-19: Signs Your Child May Need More Support**, explains how to recognize signs of stress in children and how to provide support.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Signs-your-Teen-May-Need-More-Support.aspx>



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

This article, **Taking Care of Your Mental Health in the Face of Uncertainty** by Doreen Marshall, PH.D, and Vice President of Mission Engagement, provides helpful self-care tips.

<https://afsp.org/story/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty>

FINAL NOTE FOR PARENTS

It can be emotionally difficult to accept that your child needs mental health care. Some parents feel that they are to blame for their child's mental health challenges (perhaps because their family has a history of mental illness). Or, they may believe they should have been able to prevent it. The reality is that many things contribute to the development of a mental illness. Focus instead on the opportunity to help your child, and if you need it, seek additional support for yourself. The main thing to remember is that you can only do your best. Let your child know that you will support them to get the help needed, and do not let the problem become the main focus of your relationship.

Mental Health First Aid USA