

## Effects of Social Media on Teens

Social media is a big part of daily life for lots of teenagers. Online sharing within social media sites helps many people stay in touch with friends or connect with new ones. And that may be more important for teenagers than other age groups. Friendships help teens feel supported and play a role in forming their identities. So, it's only natural to wonder how social media use might affect teens.

Mental health issues among teens have been rising for more than a decade, and some experts wonder how much social media use is to blame. If you're a parent questioning if—and how—you should monitor the way your teenager uses social media, you're not alone.

As a parent, you might ask yourself, "What, specifically, about social media use can have a negative impact on my teen?"

It raises a variety of concerns, including the amount of time adolescents spend on platforms, the type of content they consume (or are exposed to), and the degree to which their online interactions disrupt activities essential for health, such as sleep and exercise. It points out that social media can also affect young users in different ways, depending on their strengths and vulnerabilities as individuals, as well as their cultural, historical, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Frequent social media use may be associated with distinct changes in the developing brain, potentially affecting such functions as emotional learning and behavior, impulse control, and emotional regulation.

Social media doesn't affect all teens the same way. Use of social media is linked with healthy and unhealthy effects on mental health. These effects vary from one teenager to another. Social media effects on mental health depend on things such as:

- What a teen sees and does online.
- The amount of time spent online.
- Psychological factors, such as maturity level and any preexisting mental health conditions.
- Personal life circumstances, including cultural, social and economic factors.



## Unhealthy social media

Social media use may have negative effects on some teens. It might:

- Distract from homework, exercise and family activities.
- Disrupt sleep.
- Lead to information that is biased or not correct.
- Become a means to spread rumors or share too much personal information.
- Lead some teens to form views about other people's lives or bodies that aren't realistic.
- Expose some teens to online predators, who might try to exploit or extort them.
- Expose some teens to cyberbullying, which can raise the risk of mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

What's more, certain content related to risk-taking, and negative posts or interactions on social media, have been linked with self-harm and rarely, death.

How teens use social media also might determine its impact. For instance, viewing certain types of content may raise some teens' mental health risks. This could include content that depicts:

- Illegal acts.
- Self-harm or harm to other people.
- Encouragement of habits tied to eating disorders, such as purging or restrictive eating.

## Protecting your teen

You can take steps to help your teens use social media responsibly and limit some of the possible negative effects. Use these tips:

- Set rules and limits as needed.
- Manage any challenging behaviors.
- Turn on privacy settings.
- Monitor your teen's accounts.
- Have regular talks with your teen about social media.
- Be a role model for your teen.
- Explain what's not OK.
- Encourage face-to-face contact with friends.

Adapted from: <https://www.valemedicine.org/news/social-media-teen-mental-health-a-parents-guide>  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teens-and-social-media-use/art-20474437>

