

Youth and Teens Guide on Social Media and Mental Health

You have likely noticed several advantages of using social media, such as feeling a sense of community, being able to express yourself, experiencing diverse interactions, it being a creative outlet, and having feelings of acceptance.



BUT... Social media can also cause significant harm to your mental health in many ways.

BE INFORMED SO YOU CAN MAKE WISE DECISIONS AND TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH.

What is mental health?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being." Our mental health affects how we make decisions, speak and interact with others, and deal with stressors.

What is social media?

Social media is a category of applications and online websites or platforms focused on communication between individuals or groups. These forms of communication enable the sharing of many forms of information and content. Social media includes a variety of apps and websites from YouTube and TikTok to Fitbit and WhatsApp.



What's the big deal?

Although social media offers a place to communicate with others and a community to express yourself, many harmful things you could experience are because of others. In other words, most of the time it is not your fault, but you will likely experience bullying, harassment, being pressured, and much more. Your actions could reduce or prevent these incidences.

Explicit and Inappropriate Content

Pictures, videos, and other content that are not appropriate for teens or young adults can be found on most social media platforms. Seeing these images or videos could cause you to think less of yourself, have anxiety about viewing them when it is not allowed, and feel fear. Most of the time, you and others do not seek this content out, it randomly appears or pops up due to algorithms, direct pushes, and direct messages.

You Aren't Alone

"Up to 95% of youth ages 13 – 17 reports using a social media platform [and] more than a third of youth 13 – 17 say they use social media constantly." **Make a pact with your friends and peers to be aware, supportive, mindful, and seek help when necessary.**

WOW

"Youth and teens who use social media more than 3 hours per day face double the risk of experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety."



POTENTIAL RISKS

- Poor Sleep
- Harassment
- Exposure to Inappropriate Content
- Poor Body Image
- Eating Disorders
- Low Self-Esteem
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feelings of Being Pressured
- Victim of Bullying
- Excessive Worrying
- Withdrawal
- Mood Swings
- Self-Harm
- Low Energy AND MORE....

Know Who You Follow

Frequently review the people, organizations, and groups you follow. **Unfollow or remove yourself from situations that make you feel uncomfortable. Never accept followers or groups you are not familiar with or who you do not know.** This includes reporting cyberbullying, online exploitation, and content you feel is inappropriate. Ask an adult about how to report suspicious online activity.

Limit Time on Social Media

Try to limit your social media usage to 30 minutes a day. **“Decreasing your social media usage by 30 minutes a day improves depression scores by more than 35%.”**



Be Mindful About What You Share

Hackers value your private information. Be responsible by not posting your location or pictures where the setting or place is easily identifiable. **If you have to ask yourself if you should post it, you probably shouldn't.** If you have questions, always ask for help from a trusted adult.

Avoid Inappropriate Content & Interactions

If you encounter information or content that makes you feel uncomfortable or is inappropriate...

remove yourself. Yes, this sometimes means you may need to block someone. Also, do not share or forward images or content that harasses or makes fun of others. Tell the creator of the content to stop and seek help. Creating these boundaries will limit risks from social media.

Find Other Activities

When reaching your personal social media time limit, choose another activity. **Have a running list of things you love to do.** Go on a walk, start a puzzle, play with your pet, or play a game with your family.



Be Active

Research shows that being active improves physical and mental health. Playing a game of volleyball, bocce ball, swimming, or another physical activity decreases the amount of time you choose to partake in social media and ultimately improves your overall health.

Establish a Routine

Creating and maintaining a daily routine can also improve your overall health. Setting boundaries for social media and other activities as well as setting a bedtime will improve your quality of sleep, decrease anxiety, increase moments of happiness, and help with stress reduction.

Reach Out for Help

If you have questions or have negative thoughts about yourself or others, call upon a mental health professional. See a few resources below.



Conversation Starters

Teens to Parents/Trusted Adults



Feeling comfortable having a conversation with a parent or trusted adult is important for many reasons. Open communication can help you feel closer and strengthen relationships. Talking about problems or concerns with a parent or trusted adult can help you feel less stressed and find ways to cope.

Here are some great questions to help start a healthy conversation with your parent or a trusted adult about social media and mental health.

Do you think spending too much time on social media could be bad for our mental health? Why or why not?

Have you ever noticed any changes in my mood or behavior that you think might be related to my social media use?

What do you think is a healthy amount of time to spend on social media each day?
I read that social media can sometimes make people feel anxious or depressed. Have you ever felt that way because of social media?

Do you think social media helps people stay connected, or does it sometimes make people feel more isolated?

What was it like when you were growing up without social media?
Do you think life was simpler back then?

How do you manage your own social media use?
Do you have any tips for keeping it positive?

What are some ways we can make sure that social media doesn't have a negative impact on our mental health?

Have you noticed any changes in how people feel or act because of social media?
Do you believe social media can impact self-esteem? How so?

What do you think are some positive aspects of social media for mental health?
Have you ever heard about issues like cyberbullying or online peer pressure?
How would you handle them?

What do you think is the best way to balance social media use with other activities?

Do you ever worry about how social media affects me or other teens? What do you think are some good ways to use social media without it affecting your mental health?

Local and National Resources



ALABAMA

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, The Children's Trust Fund, secures resources to fund evidence-based community programs committed to the prevention of child maltreatment. We advocate for children and the strengthening of families. <https://ctf.alabama.gov/>

Alabama Family Central

Alabama Family Central is a collaboration of state agencies and partners supporting Alabama's families with resources, services, and more to help raise healthy, happy kids. Call Childhelp at **800-422-4453** to report abuse. For Internet Safety resources, visit Family Services of North Alabama

Connect Alabama App

Connect Alabama App from the Department of Mental Health, is an important tool, offering fast and reliable service to someone looking for help. The app is available for download on iOS through the app store and for Android devices via Google play.

Learn more at: <https://ctf.alabama.gov/initiatives/>

Guide made possible by funding through the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention.



NATIONAL

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health is dedicated to creating a healthy digital ecosystem for children and adolescents. <https://www.aap.org/socialmedia>

National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

NCMEC's CyberTipLine is the nation's centralized reporting system for the online exploitation of minors. All tips remain confidential. Available 24/7. **800-THE LOST (800-843-5678)** OR report at Cyber Tipline at www.cybertipline.com.

NetSmartz

NetSmartz is NCMEC's online safety education program provides age-appropriate videos and activities to help show you how to be safer online. We want you to be aware of potential online risks and empower you to make safer choices on- and offline.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the U.S. Surgeon General

This Advisory describes the current evidence on the impacts of social media on the mental health of children and adolescents. It states that we cannot conclude social media is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents and outlines immediate steps we can take to mitigate the risk of harm to children and adolescents.