

Social Media and its Impact on Teenagers

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Abstract:

Like any form of technology, social media has both an upside and a downside. And when it comes to the social media effects on teens, there are significant pros and cons to take into account. On the plus side, platforms like TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat can be lifesavers for teens who feel isolated or marginalized, particularly LGBTQ teens.

However, the impact of social media on teens can be significantly detrimental to mental health. Social media use exposes teens to cyberbullying, body image issues, and tech addiction, and results in less time spent doing healthy, real-world activities. Moreover, the addictive qualities of social media can prime the brain for addiction to substances.

Keywords: social media; teens; mental health; cyberbullying.

Introduction:

Social media is a term for internet sites and apps that you can use to share content you've created. Social media also lets you respond to content that others post. That can include pictures, text, reactions or comments on posts by others, and links to information.

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.

Social media is a big part of daily life for lots of teenagers.

How big? A 2022 survey of 13- to 17-year-olds offers a clue. Based on about 1,300 responses, the survey found that 35% of teens use at least one of five social media platforms more than several times a day. The five social media platforms are: YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

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.

Here are the general pros and cons of teen social media use, along with tips for parents.

Healthy social media

Social media lets teens create online identities, chat with others and build social networks. These networks can provide teens with support from other people who have hobbies or experiences in common. This type of support especially may help teens who:

- Lack social support offline or are lonely.
- Are going through a stressful time.

- Belong to groups that often get marginalized, such as racial minorities, the LGBTQ community and those who are differently abled.

- Have long-term medical conditions.

Sometimes, social media platforms help teens:

- Express themselves.
- Connect with other teens locally and across long distances.
- Learn how other teens cope with challenging life situations and mental health conditions.
- View or take part in moderated chat forums that encourage talking openly about topics such as mental health.
- Ask for help or seek healthcare for symptoms of mental health conditions.

These healthy effects of social media can help teens in general. They also may help teens who are prone to depression stay connected to others. And social media that's humorous or distracting may help a struggling teen cope with a challenging day.

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.

The risks of social media use are linked with various factors. One may be how much time teens spend on these platforms.

In a study focusing on 12- to 15-year-olds in the United States, spending three hours a day using social media was linked to a higher risk of mental health concerns. That study was based on data collected in 2013 and 2014 from more than 6,500 participants.

Another study looked at data on more than 12,000 teens in England between the ages of 13 to 16. The researchers found that using social media more than three times a day predicted poor mental health and well-being in teens.

But not all research has found a link between time spent on social media and mental health risks in teens.

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.

These types of content may be even more risky for teens who already have a mental health condition. Being exposed to discrimination, hate or cyberbullying on social media also can raise the risk of anxiety or depression.

What teens share about themselves on social media also matters.

With the teenage brain, it's common to make a choice before thinking it through. So, teens might post something when they're angry or upset, and regret it later. That's known as stress posting.

Teens who post content also are at risk of sharing sexual photos or highly personal stories. This can lead to teens being bullied, harassed or even blackmailed.

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.** This helps prevent social media from getting in the way of activities, sleep, meals or homework.
For example, you could make a rule about not using social media until homework is done. Or you could set a daily time limit for social media use.
You also could choose to keep social media off-limits during certain times. These times might include during family meals and an hour before bed.
Set an example by following these rules yourself. And let your teen know what the consequences will be if your rules aren't followed.
- **Manage any challenging behaviors.** If your teen's social media use starts to challenge your rules or your sense of what's appropriate, talk with your teen about it. You also could connect with parents of your teen's friends or take a look at your teen's internet history.
- **Turn on privacy settings.** This can help keep your teen from sharing personal information or data that your teen didn't mean to share. Each of your teen's social media accounts likely has privacy setting that can be changed.
- **Monitor your teen's accounts.** The American Psychological Association recommends you regularly review your child's social media use during the early teen years.
One way to monitor is to follow or "friend" your child's social accounts. As your teen gets older, you can choose to monitor your teen's social media less. Your teen's maturity level can help guide your decision.
- **Have regular talks with your teen about social media.** These talks give you chances to ask how social media has been making your teen feel. Encourage your teen to let you know if something online worries or bothers your teen.
Regular talks offer you chances to give your child advice about social media too. For example, you can teach your teen to question whether content is accurate. You also can explain that social media is full of images about beauty and lifestyle that are not realistic.
- **Be a role model for your teen.** You might want to tell your child about your own social media habits. That can help you set a good example and keep your regular talks from being one-sided.

- **Explain what's not OK.** Remind your teen that it's hurtful to gossip, spread rumors, bully or harm someone's reputation — online or otherwise.
Also remind your teen not to share personal information with strangers online. This includes people's addresses, telephone numbers, passwords, and bank or credit card numbers.
- **Encourage face-to-face contact with friends.** This is even more important for teens prone to social anxiety.

Talk to your child's healthcare professional if you think your teen has symptoms of anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns related to social media use. Also talk with your child's care professional if your teen has any of the following symptoms:

- Uses social media even when wanting to stop.
- Uses it so much that school, sleep, activities or relationships suffer.
- Often spends more time on social platforms than you intended.
- Lies in order to use social media

The Effect of Social Media on Teenagers' Mental Health

Are teens and social media platforms a good mix, or does social media use lower teen well-being? Why is social media bad? This has become one of the more controversial questions regarding social media's effects on teens, with studies showing varied results.

Positive Effects of Social Media on Teenagers

According to a report released by **Common Sense Media** on social media's effects on teens, about half of the 1,500 young people surveyed said social media experiences are very important for them in order to get support and advice, feel less alone, and express their creative side, as well as for staying in touch with **friends** and family members. And 43 percent said that using social media makes them feel better when they are depressed, stressed, or anxious. Among LGBTQ youth, 52 percent said social media helps them feel better when they are experiencing these difficult emotions.

Negative Effects of Social Media on Teens

On the other hand, the report also showed a strong association between social media and teens feeling depressed. Youth with moderate to severe **depressive symptoms** were nearly twice as likely to say they used social media almost constantly: One-third of teens with depression reported constant social media use, as compared to 18 percent of young people who did not have depressive symptoms.

Furthermore, the more severe their symptoms were, the more anxious, lonely and depressed they felt after using social media. And another study found that teens who spend more than three hours or more on social media daily have **an increased risk of self-harm**. Clearly, social media does not help teens who are already feeling depressed and seems to contribute to their negative outlook.

Why Social Media Can Be Bad for Mental Health

Is social media part of the reason that teen depression has drastically increased over the last decade? Surveys of US adolescents show that teen depressive symptoms and suicide rates **showed marked increases between 2010 and 2015**, especially among females.

Some researchers theorize that the increase in social media and overall screen use between those years could account for these changes. The adolescents surveyed who spent more time on social

media sites were more likely to report mental health issues. Those who spent more time on real-life activities, such as in-person social interaction, sports, exercise, homework, and print media, were less likely to report these issues.

Research on Social Media and Teen Depression

Over the last decade, this theory has been borne out by a large body of **research** linking teenagers' use of social media with increased **teen depression**. These studies show that the frequency of a teen's use of social media has a clear correlation to their mental health.

For example, in a **2018 study**, 14- to 17-year-olds whose social media usage exceeded seven hours per day were more than twice as likely to have been diagnosed with depression, treated by a mental health professional, or taken medication for a psychological or behavioral issue during the last year. This was compared to teen users who were on screens only about an hour a day.

Many experts believe that the constant overstimulation of social networking shifts the nervous system into fight-or-flight mode. As a result, this makes disorders such as ADHD, teen depression, oppositional defiant disorder, and **teen anxiety** worse. However, some research on social media and teen depression shows that the causality goes the other way—i.e., when teens are depressed, they look at social media more often. In one **study** of 600 young people, researchers found that social media use did not predict depressive symptoms, but greater depressive symptoms predicted more social media use over time.

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