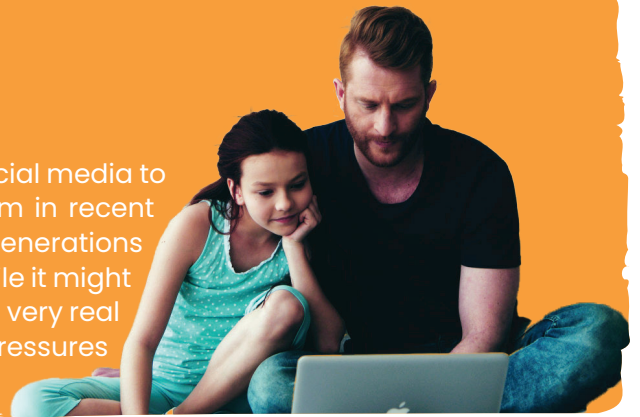


# SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

It can be difficult for adults who grew up without or with limited social media to get why it's so important to young people. The technology boom in recent years has created a massive cultural difference between older generations and Generation Z, who grew up with widespread social media. While it might not seem important to you, social media matters to youth and is a very real part of our world – so it's important to understand the unique pressures and challenges they face because of it.



## WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

### How does social media help your mental health?

- "WATCHING ASMR VIDEOS"
- "BY MAKING ME NOT FEEL ALONE"
- "IT GIVES ME AN ESCAPE WHEN I AM FEELING VERY ANXIOUS"
- "ACCESS TO VISUALS/BITE-SIZED INFO RELATED TO COPING STRATEGIES, MENTAL HEALTH, ETC."
- "I FOLLOW A LOT OF POSITIVE ACCOUNTS THAT INSPIRE ME"
- "FEELING CONNECTED TO THE GREATER WHOLE"
- "FOLLOWING ACCOUNTS THAT SUPPORT MY MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY"
- "CONNECTING WITH FRIENDS FAR AWAY"

### How does social media harm your mental health?

- "POSTS GLORIFYING EATING DISORDERS"
- "WHEN I LOSE TRACK OF TIME AND END UP SCROLLING THE DAY AWAY"
- "COMPARISON"
- "BLACK HOLES OF NEGATIVITY"
- "WATCHING EXTREME UNHEALTHY CONFLICT IN COMMENTS"
- "EXPECTING FOR PEOPLE TO RESPOND AS FAST AS I WANT THEM TO"
- "MODELS"
- "LOOKING AT PEOPLE HAVING A LIFE I WISH TO HAVE"
- "SEEING OTHERS THAT HAVE BETTER LOOKING BODIES THAN I DO"

## FAST FACTS

- Forty-five percent of teens believe social media has neither a positive nor negative impact on people their age. 31% say social media has a mostly positive impact and 24% say it has a mostly negative impact.<sup>1</sup>
- Most teens who view social media as generally positive emphasized its role in keeping in touch and interacting with others.<sup>2</sup>
- 59% of U.S. teens have personally experienced abusive online behaviors, with the most common being name-calling which 42% of teens say they have experienced.<sup>3</sup>
- During COVID-19, poorer mental health was associated with using social media for entertainment motives. Better mental health was associated with using social media for personal contact and keeping up relationships.<sup>4</sup>
- A global study found school loneliness to be correlated with increases in smartphone and internet use – when countries reached a point where half of the teen population had access to smartphones, loneliness levels began to rise.<sup>5</sup>
- Youth from lower-income families are more likely to report that their online experiences led to negative offline interactions.<sup>6</sup>
- Almost twice as many LGBTQ+ students reported being cyberbullied compared to heterosexual students (36% versus 20%).<sup>7</sup>
- Lower socioeconomic status can exacerbate the negative impacts of social media through comparisons to more affluent peers, more unstructured time in the home, or lack of outdoor spaces.<sup>8</sup>

# CULTIVATING HEALTHY SOCIAL MEDIA USE WITH YOUTH IN YOUR LIFE

While social media can certainly cause problems, it's here to stay and young people are going to use it whether adults like it or not. Parents and schools have a tough job – the goal isn't to keep students off social media altogether, but to support them in developing healthy social media behaviors.

## Celebrate the positives

When youth feel judged or misunderstood about their social media use, they're likely to get defensive or shut down. Make sure to point out how great it is that they were able to connect with their friends and family who live far away, or comment on how helpful it must be to reach most of their classmates for an emergency study buddy.

## Ask questions

Let's face it – most youth know way more about social media than the adults in their life. And they definitely know more about what exactly they're doing online. Instead of starting conversations by talking about the harms or effects of social media, be open and curious about their unique experiences with it.

## Promote limiting screen time

Everything in moderation, right? Excessive time on the internet and social media has been linked to poorer mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Younger children will need more help with this – consider setting time limits or media-free zones. As children get older, support them in managing their own usage – encourage them to dedicate time to offline activities or help them update their phone settings to limit time on certain apps..

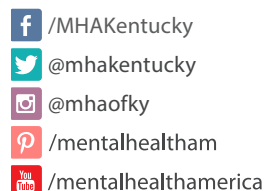
## Model healthy use

Young people notice what adults are doing more than we may think, including being told to get off their devices while the adults in their life seem just as obsessed. It can be tempting to try to manage their use, but you're better off modeling healthy habits (age dependent, of course). Studies have shown that parental use of digital technology, rather than their attitudes toward it, determines how their children will engage with it.

## Friend/follow your kids' accounts

Your kids – especially teenagers – might resist you monitoring their social media, but it's important that you're (somewhat) informed of what's happening in their online world. Explain your reasoning, listen to their hesitations, and let them set boundaries. Your virtual relationship with your child is an entirely new one, so be patient. Your best bet to build trust is to stay in the background: Don't comment or like their posts unless they want you to, let the little things slide, and be ready to have offline conversations about the important things.

If social media use seems to be impacting the mental health of a child or teen in your life, suggest that they take a screen at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) to determine if they might be experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition.



[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

**IN CRISIS?** If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 988 or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.

### SOURCES

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- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/09/27/a-majority-of-teens-have-experienced-some-form-of-cyberbullying/>
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- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197121000853>
- <sup>6</sup> [https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476\(19\)31627-0/fulltext?\\_ga=2.229481182.371844695.1658177465-2083710329.1656532476](https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476(19)31627-0/fulltext?_ga=2.229481182.371844695.1658177465-2083710329.1656532476)
- <sup>7</sup> <https://cyberbullying.org/bullying-cyberbullying-sexual-orientation-lgbtq.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/58624/how-parents-and-educators-can-support-healthy-teen-use-of-social-media>
- <sup>9</sup> Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: the influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 79-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1590851>
- <sup>10</sup> Terras, M. M. & Ramsay, J. (2016). Family digital literacy practices and children's mobile phone use. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01957>