Social Media and Youth
What Parents Should Know

"The Internet and world of smart phone apps are wild and wonderful places that allow us to learn and share at never-before-seen speeds. The problem is, not everything being shared is appropriate for everyone who has access to view it."
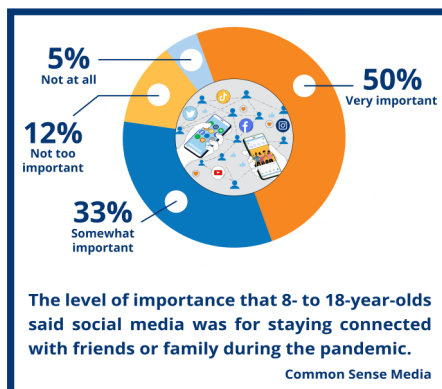
Mental Health America

Social Media Use is Increasing

Social media has transformed the way that we connect with each other. Social media refers to websites, applications, and gaming chat rooms that allow users to create and share content with others from all over the world. Most young people have never known a world without instant access to the internet and social networking platforms.

The increased popularity of social media and widespread ownership of smart phones has created parenting challenges not encountered twenty years ago. Cyberbullying, communication with online predators, sexting, and exposure to inappropriate material have caused many concerns about the safety and mental health of our youth. But social media also played a very important role in keeping our youth connected with friends and family during the coronavirus pandemic.

Knowing what their child is doing online can be difficult for many parents. In a 2021 survey by C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, two in five parents said that monitoring their children's use of social media was too time-consuming, and one third thought parental controls were "a waste of time" because children often find ways around them. With children spending more time online these days, parents may worry about their child's increased use of technology in general and social media in particular. This newsletter will review some of the most popular apps used by children and teens, and give tips and resources on how to teach your child responsible online behavior as well as what parents can do to minimize online risks.

5% Not at all

12% Not too important

33% Somewhat important

50% Very important

The level of importance that 8- to 18-year-olds said social media was for staying connected with friends or family during the pandemic.
Common Sense Media

PREVENTION SERVICES

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Popular Apps

Devices, apps, and app features change frequently, making it hard to keep up. These apps are very popular:

Facebook is used to share thoughts and media content with others.

Instagram lets users post photos and videos, and send messages.

Snapchat users can exchange pictures, chats, and videos (called snaps) that are meant to disappear after they're viewed.

TikTok is a video-sharing app used to create and share short videos.

Twitter is a site where users post short messages known as tweets.

YouTube is a video-sharing service where users can watch, like, share, comment on, and upload their own videos.

Messaging Apps

Even though smart phones have built-in text messaging tools, an AP-NORC Center survey found that 40 percent of teens also use third-party messaging apps like Kik, WhatsApp, or Line to exchange messages, group chat, talk, and share videos with friends.

These apps include features such as anonymous messaging, the ability to chat with strangers, and self destructing messages, photos, and videos. These features might embolden teens, leading them to divulge too much information, participate in cyberbullying, or expose them to predators. Another concern is how these apps make it easy for teens to hide important information from parents, which could potentially get them into trouble.

TikTok

TikTok is extremely popular with tweens and teens. About one-third of American users are 10–19 years old, and the average TikTok user opens the app eight times per day.

Last fall, a TikTok challenge encouraging kids to steal or vandalize school property caused schools across America to lock their bathrooms. It was one of the 2021-22 TikTok School Challenges that are not endorsed by TikTok, but are created and posted by TikTok users. The October challenge was "Slap A Teacher", which is a felony. Challenges for the rest of this school year are March's "Make a mess in the courtyard or cafeteria", April's "Steal some eggs", May's "Ditch Day", and June's "Flip off a front office staff person". Many middle and high school students who are on TikTok are aware of these monthly school challenges. Parents need to be aware as well.

Most popular TikTok challenges are harmless or silly, like the Plank Challenge, which involves doing 15 to 30 seconds of various plank positions to a fast version of the song, "Pretty Girl". But others are really dangerous, like the newest viral TikTok challenge, the Orbeez Challenge, that has kids using toy guns to shoot water gel beads at unsuspecting friends or random targets.

Taking an active role in your child's social media use and discussing viral challenges with them can help your child make better decisions about participating in these challenges.

Social Media and Teen Brains

The same brain circuits that are activated by eating chocolate and winning money are activated when teenagers see large numbers of "likes" on their own photos or the photos of peers on social media, according to a UCLA study in which adolescents underwent MRIs while viewing photos on Instagram. Researchers found that when teens believed their photos had gotten more "likes", they showed greater activation in the brain's reward circuitry. So for teens, getting "likes" feels good, even at the neural level.
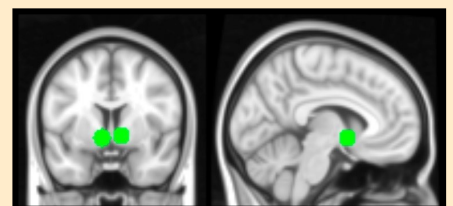
Social Media Concerns

Teaching your children about these and other online risks and how to avoid or report threats is one of the most important steps you can take to ensure their online safety.

- **Inappropriate content** - Children online may come across things that are not suitable for their age, including sexual, hate-filled, or graphic images or posts.

- **Online predators** - Most contact with online predators happens in chat rooms, on social media, or in the chat feature of a multiplayer game. Research shows that 12-15 year-old boys and girls are most at risk.

- **Sexting** - Sexting or "sex texting" is sending or getting sexually explicit or suggestive images, messages, or videos on a smartphone or through the Internet.

- **Cyberbullying** - Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. It can be persistent, permanent, hard to notice, and anonymous. These factors magnify feelings of shame and helplessness.

Sexting Study Results

A study published in JAMA Pediatrics showed that sexting has become more common among adolescents. Among those aged 12-17 studied:

At least **1 in 4** are receiving sexually explicit texts and emails

At least **1 in 7** are sending sexts

More than **1 in 10** teens are forwarding sexts without consent

About **1 in 12** teens have had sexts they've sent forwarded without their consent

- Talk openly about personal responsibility, personal boundaries, and how to resist peer pressure

- Explain, early and often, that a sent image or message cannot be taken back

Online Awareness

Even though most 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' approval. Here are some suggestions to help parents be more aware of their child's online activities.

- Put the computer in a common area to better monitor online activity

- Utilize parental monitoring software

- Check your child's browser history frequently and their location and privacy settings

- Know your child's user names and passwords

- Follow or friend your teen on social media sites

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

How To Balance Your Child's Social Media Usage

- **Take breaks**. Encourage them to take breaks from social media, which could include deactivating social media accounts.

- **Turn off notifications**. Turn off app notifications or keep them on silent to cut down on distractions.

- **Unfriend, unfollow, mute.** Talk to them about removing people who do not show them respect or make them feel good about themselves.

- **Track screen time**. Have them keep track of how much time they spend on their phone and social media.

- **Keep a balanced perspective**. Balance how much time they spend online with time spent seeing their friends in person, engaging in activities, and having a non-digital social life.

Good Digital Citizenship

Children today live largely in a digital community, so teaching them to be mindful of their online interactions, posts, and comments is important. Digital citizenship refers to the responsible enforcement of smart and safe social media habits. These are some recommendations to be a good digital citizen:

- **Think before you post.** Avoid posting on social media accounts while emotions are high. Ask yourself, "Would I say this to them in person?".
- **Avoid oversharing.** Specific information about yourself gives others the ability to steal your identity.
- **Protect your privacy.** Check your privacy settings often to make sure what others can see on your accounts.
- **Check where your information comes from.** Fact check to avoid spreading misinformation.
- **Protect and change passwords regularly.**

- **Report Illegal activity and poor behavior.** If you see suspicious activity or cyberbullying, report it to prevent future occurrences.

Temple University

NetSmartz®

NetSmartz offers a comprehensive collection of **Internet Safety** materials including presentations, videos, and interactive games.

https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/resources

ConsumerNotice.org offers a large selection of Internet Safety articles to help you educate your child about various online risks.

https://www.consumernotice.org/data-protection/internet-safety-for-kids/

common sense media

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

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

Common Sense 2021 Census: The Role of Media During the Pandemic: Connection, Creativity, and Learning for Tweens and Teens

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/8-18-role-of-media-research-report-final-web.pdf

DFi DIGITAL FUTURES INITIATIVE

Digital Futures Initiative's goal is to help kids thrive in today's high tech world. Resources for parents include an app and website directory, tools to use to prevent distracted driving, and a guide that shows how kids can hide content on their phones.

https://www.dfinow.org/downloads/

ConnectSafely

A collection of clearly written guides for parents that demystify popular apps, services, and platforms.

https://www.connectsafely.org/parentguides/

PREVENTION SERVICES

PERSONAL **PASSIONATE** PROGRESSIVE

Visit our Prevention Services website for parent resources on social media and other important topics.

http://www.leeschools.net/prevention