

Parent Guide on Social Media and Mental Health

Although there are many advantages to allowing your young adult or teen access to a social media platform (e.g. finding a sense of community, expressing themselves, experiencing diverse populations and ideas, and finding their creative outlet)



YOU MAY HAVE WONDERED...

Can social media also cause significant harm to my child's 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, including images, videos, and other "files." Social media encompasses a variety of apps and websites that range from YouTube and TikTok to Fitbit and WhatsApp.



"Adolescents, ages 10 to 19 are undergoing a highly sensitive period of brain development...a time when mental health challenges such as depression typically emerge."¹

“Frequent social media use may be associated with distinct changes in the developing brain in the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex.”²

What’s the big deal?

Although social media offers a place for your child to communicate with others and a community to express themselves, your child could experience many harmful things because of the actions of others. Social media and the contents your child may be exposed to could lead to a heightened level of emotional sensitivity or even a decrease in life satisfaction. Your actions could reduce the chances of or even prevent these incidences from occurring.

“6 in 10

...girls say they’ve been contacted by a stranger in ways that make them feel uncomfortable.”⁴

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. **If your child is exposed to such content, it could cause your child to think less of themselves, have anxiety about viewing content, and feel fear of punishment, discipline, and conversations with their family.**

Most of the time, children do not actively seek this content out. Rather, it randomly appears or pops up due to algorithms, direct pushes, and targeted direct messages.

You and Your Child 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.”⁶

Make a pact with your child to be aware, supportive, mindful, and help your your child seek help when necessary.



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

Build a Family Media Plan

As a family, set boundaries and rules about social media. Reach agreements on how technology and social media activity fit into your lives as a family unit.

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%.”⁷ Additionally, modeling this habit and behavior will strengthen your parent and child bond because of an increase in the amount of conversation.

- Delay the age of first use
- Establish tech-free zones
- Be available to your child for conversations and discussions

Trust Your Child

You should certainly “friend” and monitor your child’s social media content, but refrain from being intrusive. “Give your child the benefit of the doubt” and initiate conversation rather than confiscating their phone and sifting through messages. These actions can be damaging to the relationship and limit or totally eliminate open communication and a sense of security or safety.

Find Other Activities

When you or your child reaches your personal social media time limits, choose another activity. **Have a running list of things you, your child, and your family love to do.** Go on a walk, start a puzzle, play with your pet, or play a game as a family. 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 and your family choose to partake in social media and ultimately improves overall health.

Keep an Open Dialogue

Strive to initiate regular and open conversations about social media with your family. Encourage accountability and ask open-ended questions that lead to meaningful conversations.

- What do you like about social media? What don’t you like?
- How do you feel when you are on a social media app or platform?
- Have you ever been surprised by something on social media, or have you ever felt uncomfortable?



Know Who You Follow

Frequently review the people, organizations, and groups you follow. Unfollow or remove yourself from situations that are not a positive model for your child. This includes reporting cyberbullying, online exploitation, and content you feel is inappropriate. Show your child how to report suspicious online activity and model this with and for your child.

70%

of parents say technology and social media are the top two reasons parenting can become difficult. 5

Establish a Routine

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

Talk to a Professional

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



The internet provides a lot of information, but it does not have your values.

Share information with your children before the internet does.

Conversation Starters

Parents to Teens

Healthy conversations only exist with compassion, empathy, and open-mindedness. It's crucial to listen carefully, understanding not only the words but also the emotion expressed.

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

How do you feel after spending time on social media? Do you notice any changes in your mood?

Do you ever find yourself comparing your life to what you see on social media? How does that make you feel?

What do you think are the biggest pressures you face on social media?

Have you ever taken a break from social media? How did it affect you?

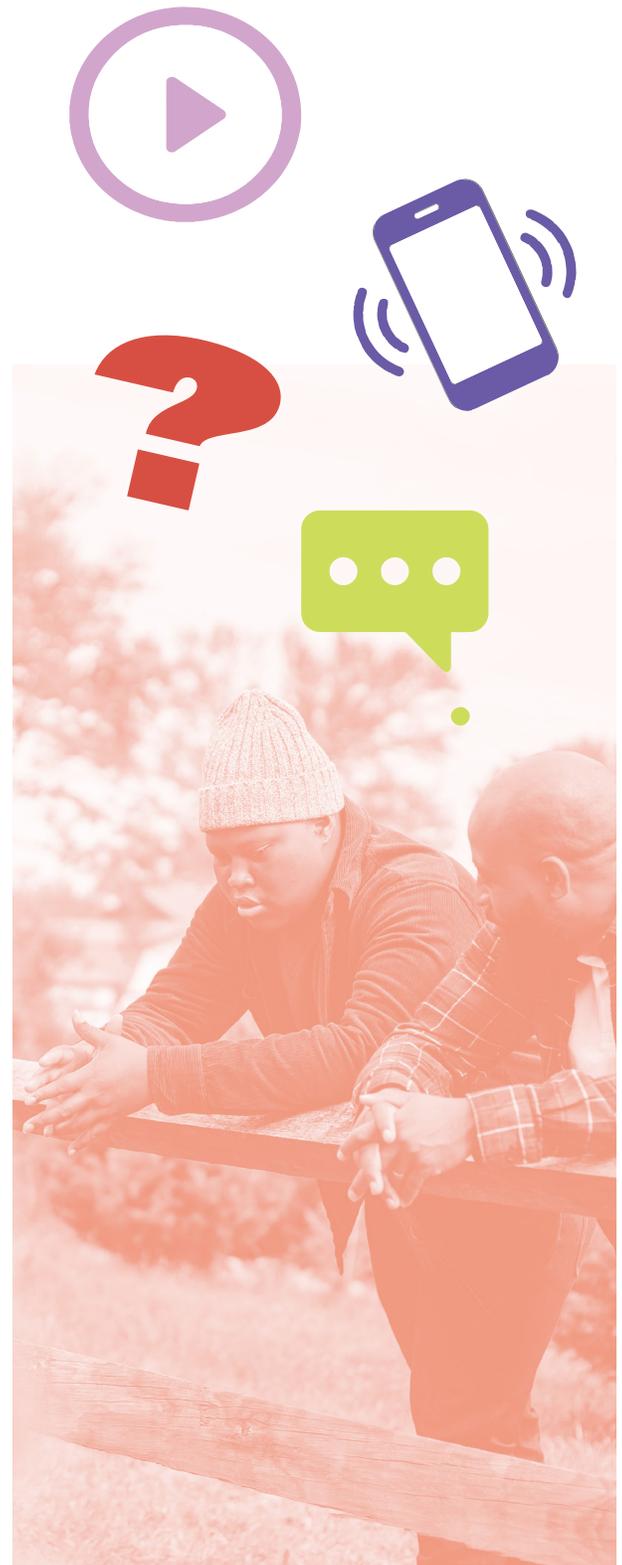
Do you think social media affects how you see yourself or how you interact with others?

Do you think social media puts pressure on people to look or act a certain way?

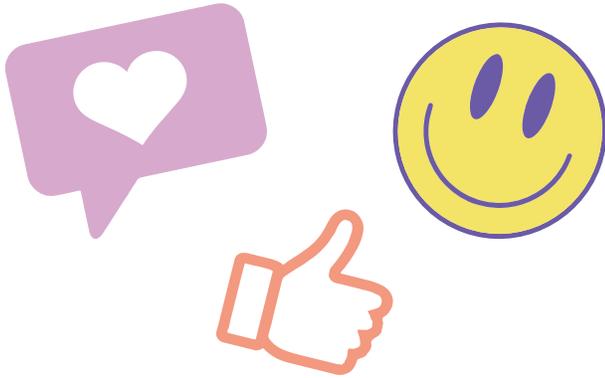
Have you ever felt stressed or anxious because of something you saw online?

How do you handle seeing negative or upsetting posts on social media?

What do you think are some good ways to use social media without it affecting your mental health?



Local and National Resources



ALABAMA

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.

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.

Parenting Assistance Line (PAL)

The Parenting Assistance Line provides helpful assistance to moms, dads, grandparents, caregivers, and anyone who wants to nurture a happy, health family. Whether you need a sympathetic ear or real resources, PAL's specialists are there for you! Available from 9am-4pm, Monday-Friday. Call, text, or use the online chat option. Messages can be left at any time. Call. **866-962-3030.**

NAMI Alabama Crisis Line

800-273-8255. National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) – The Crisis of Youth Mental Health We need to listen to our young people. We need to commit to keep learning about what they are going through, and we need to invest in them. We can't afford to lose any more young people to suicide or to allow them to suffer in silence any longer. Our young people need us — and we need them. Call NAMI Helpline at **800-950-6264** M-F, 9am-9pm CST. In a crisis, text **"NAMI" to 741741** for 24/7, confidential, free crisis counseling.

NATIONAL

Center for Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

This National Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health will serve as a centralized, trusted source for evidence-based education and technical assistance to support the mental health of children and adolescents as they navigate social media. <https://www.aap.org/socialmedia>

Mental Health Association of Delaware

The Mental Health Association in Delaware (MHA) is a statewide, nonprofit organization founded in 1932 to promote mental health. MHA provides services throughout Delaware, and our focus is education, support and advocacy for mental health issues. <https://www.mhainde.org/>

The Child Mind Institute

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. <https://childmind.org/>

American Psychological Association

APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, with more than 157,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students as its members. Their mission is to promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives. <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the U.S. Surgeon General ^{1,2,5,6,7}

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. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/youth-mental-health/social-media/index.html>

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

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Thorn for Parents

Thorn for Parents puts more control into parents, and kids, hands. They offer discussion guides for talking to kids between the ages of 7 and 17. You can sign up for text alert reminders for conversations. These provide simple ice-breaker conversation starters about the most difficult topics in today's digital world.

NetSmartz

NetSmartz is NCMEC's online safety education program that provides age-appropriate videos and activities to help teach children be safer online with the goal of helping children to become more aware of potential online risks and empowering them to help prevent victimization by making safer choices on- and offline.

Cleveland Clinic ⁴

Cleveland Clinic was at the forefront of modern medicine when its founders opened it as a multi-specialty group practice in 1921. In its first century, Cleveland Clinic has introduced many medical firsts, opened facilities around the world and is proud to be ranked among the top hospitals in the country. Now, 100 years later, the vision of the founders remains Cleveland Clinic's mission: caring for life, researching for health, and educating those who serve. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/dangers-of-social-media-for-youth>

Yale Medicine ³

Yale Medicine offers specialist expertise, advanced and innovative technology and a multidisciplinary approach. We deliver exceptional medical care in a nurturing environment to each of our patients, every day. <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/social-media-teen-mental-health-a-parents-guide#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20research%20study,incl%20depression%20and%20anxiety%20symptoms>

