

HELPFUL OR HARMFUL?

Social Media and Youth Mental Health

Adapted from Dr. Caitlin Costello's UCLA Division of Population Behavioral Health STAR Seminar Presentation, [Protecting Youth Online: Clinical and Legal Perspectives on Social Media and Online Risk-Taking](#) (August 17, 2022)



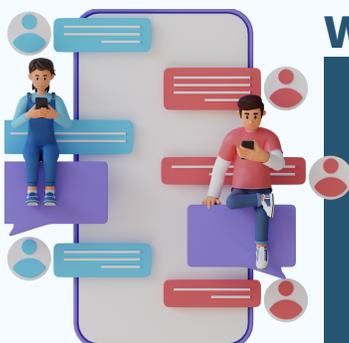
Is social media harmful? It's complicated. Social media has quickly become one of the most used tools for creating, sharing, and viewing information. This is especially true for children, teens, and young adults who use social media far more than their parents, caregivers, or other adults in their communities. Social media use can be beneficial for some while also posing unique risks.

BENEFITS:

- ✓ Increased social connection
- ✓ Community building
- ✓ Education and digital learning
- ✓ Access to crisis services and mental health resources
- ✓ Increased independence
- ✓ Intentional distraction can be a form of healthy coping (in moderation)
- ✓ Fun!

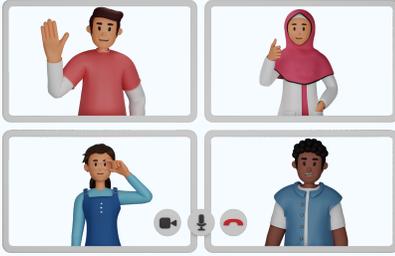
RISKS:

- ✗ Instagram's curated pictures often promote unrealistic body image and lifestyle
- ✗ Pressure to stay connected, which can lead to social media addiction
- ✗ Exposure to harmful or risky content (substance use, eating disorders, unhealthy body image, etc.)
- ✗ Cyberbullying (bullying that occurs online, (texting, social network sites)
- ✗ Legal risks can result from sexting (digitally sharing sexually explicit photos or videos)
- ✗ Reputation damage (online posts may be viewed by future employers, schools, etc. and can harm one's image and interfere with potential opportunities and/or have potential legal implications)



What are the possible mental health impacts?

- May increase depression, anxiety, body image issues
- May decrease loneliness and isolation
- May decrease wellbeing, life satisfaction, and interfere with school performance
- Teens who struggle with mental health say Instagram makes it worse
 - 1 in 5 teens say Instagram makes them feel worse about themselves
 - Instagram worsens body image issues for 1 in 3 teen girls
 - Teens blame Instagram for increased depression and anxiety rates



What can parents, caregivers, and caring adults do to help youth stay safe online?

Educate themselves and youth about safety measures, benefits, and risks of social media use.

Examine their own social media habits and the example these habits set for your youth.

Stay informed about popular social media platforms youth are using.

Engage in open dialogue with youth on posting and scrolling habits, decision-making, and content they see.

Keep an eye on the youth's mental health and seek support when needed.

Discuss how to stay safe (responding to cyberbullying or sexting; laws around sexting) and offer non-judgmental guidance when issues arise.

Consider or establish household/family policies on social media.

- Level of monitoring may vary depending on youth's age & maturity.
- Consider engaging parental controls.
- Keep track of the types of online activities (websites, communications, etc.) youth is using.
- Periodically check in and ask to view their accounts together.

Participate in online safety programs for youth and parents/caregivers.

- Common Sense Education's Digital Citizenship Curriculum provides age-specific lessons and guidance for educators, parents/caregivers, and youth around responsible social media use.



Consider evaluating youth's social media habits with a Social Media Risk Assessment.