



Teen Mental Health and Social Media

Up to 95% of teens aged 13-17 use at least one social media platform, with about 1/3 of them saying they are on social media "almost constantly." While age 13 is the typical minimum age for most platforms, almost 40% of kids aged 8-12 are using social media. Teen mental health can be impacted by social media use.

The US Surgeon General points out that with the brain development occurring between ages 10-19, tweens and teens are at the greatest risk for the mental health challenges that can occur with social media use.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Early adolescence is the time when a person's identity and self worth are being formed. Frequent social media use may increase sensitivity to social rewards and punishments. You may see this in your teen's responses to their posts. Do they feel sad if they don't get enough "likes" to a post? Do they delete posts they didn't receive the feedback they wanted?

Social media use is linked with later decreases in life satisfaction. It appears that people who are heavily online as teens tend to rely more on what others tell them they should like or be happy with, rather than developing a sense of satisfaction for themselves.

Teens on social media are more likely to report feelings of depression and anxiety, showing that teen mental health can be impacted by this use. A real life opportunity to see these impacts occurred as Facebook rolled out across college campuses: increases in depression (by 9%) and anxiety (by 12%) followed. Limiting use to 30 minutes or less per day over just 3 weeks led to significant decreases in depression severity.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

The Surgeon General report recommends the following:

- Create a plan including agreed upon expectations for tech use in your family.
- Create tech-free zones for everyone in your family. Encourage in person friendships.
- Model responsible online and tech behavior.
- Teach kids about technology and how to be responsible online.
- Report cyberbullying and online abuse and exploitation
- Work with other parents in your community to establish norms for your group of children and teens.