

CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

common sense

Social Media, Gaming & Mental Health

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We are

We are a trusted guide for the families, educators, and advocates who help kids thrive. We provide resources to harness the power of media and technology, and to shape public policy to improve the well-being of every child.

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Child Mind Institute

The **only independent nonprofit** organization exclusively dedicated to transforming mental health care for children everywhere.

To help children reach their full potential we must:

- Develop more effective treatments for childhood psychiatric and learning disorders.
- Empower children, families and teachers with the scientifically sound information they need.
- Build the science of healthy brain development.

The Child Mind Institute does not accept funding from the pharmaceutical industry.



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What We'll Cover

- 1 Big Picture: What's happening with teens' mental health?
- 2 Brain Development: What are they thinking?
- 3 Potential Pitfalls & Practical Tips: Comparison, pressure, drama, and isolation
- 4 Worst-Case Warning Signs: What to look for and what to do
- 5 Potential Positives: What's the good news?

Big Picture: What's Happening With Teens' Mental Health?

Causes vs. Correlations: Lack of Clarity

- 1 **Overall statistics**
Between 13 and 20% of children in the U.S. experience a mental disorder in a given year.
- 2 **Increase in depression**
There was a 33% increase in the number of eighth- to 12th-graders who had high levels of depressive symptoms from 2010-2015.
- 3 **Suicide Rate**
Suicide is the second leading cause of death of people age 15-24.
- 4 **Some Research Links to Social Media**
Teens who spent 5+ hours on devices were 66% more likely to have at least one suicide-related outcome.
- 5 **On the other hand...**
Other researchers say that data actually shows that social media only explains .36% of depressive symptoms.
- 6 **So many variables**
Because there are so many variables and the connections between causes and outcomes are unclear, we don't have a lot of clear answers.

Twenge, et al., 2017; Kessler, et al., 2005; CDC, 2017

What We Know for Sure



How much they use matters

Teens who use the most digital media are the most unhappy.



What they're using it for matters.

Teens who use social media passively or only to get likes and follows have the most negative outcomes.



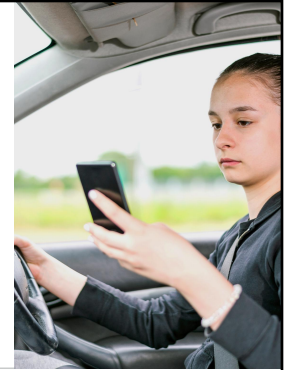
Other factors might matter more.

Overall media balance, sleep, general health, and other factors play a huge role in mental health.

Brain Development: What Are They Thinking?

The Teenage Brain

- ✓ Prefrontal cortex helps us think ahead, see consequences, and make decisions.
- ✓ Teens' prefrontal cortex isn't finished developing.
- ✓ They see situations as absolute truths that will last forever.
- ✓ Tweens develop meta-cognitive abilities and awareness of others' opinions of them.



Bottom Line:


*A teen's brain is evolving,
so risk-taking,
poor decision-making,
awareness of peer approval,
and absolute thinking increase.*



**Potential Pitfalls & Practical Tips:
Comparison, Pressure,
Drama, Isolation**

Comparison

*What teens see on social media can
become a personal ruler, and trying to
measure up can bring them down.*

- ✓ Altered images
- ✓ Presentation of perfection
- ✓ Focus on the superficial
- ✓ Highly visible sexual images
- ✓ Insta-judgement
- ✓ Social media metrics available 24/7





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Effects of The Social Media Measuring Tape

Everyone else has it together.
I should be happier, more successful, or "better" in some way.

Everyone else is cooler and better looking.
My looks don't measure up.

No one will like the real me.
I work hard to look perfect online because no one will like my imperfections.





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How To Help



Take the effects of social media seriously.
"It's really hard to feel like you have to measure up to someone else, huh?"

Combat "duck syndrome."
"Boy, these pictures sure make everything seem perfect, but nobody's life is perfect."

Pull back the curtain on perfection.
"Hmm, how many selfies do you think she took to get this one? Which filter did she use?"

Foster failure, and emphasize effort.
"I really messed up at work, but listen to how I tried hard to fix it ..."



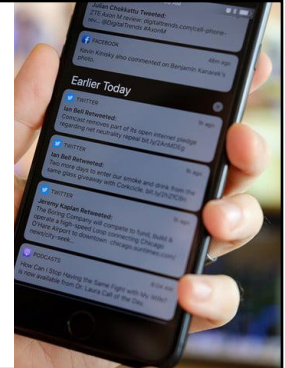


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Be kind:
Everyone you meet is
fighting a hard battle.
-Ian Maclaren

Pressure

*Falling prey to tech tricks, keeping up
with connections, and staying in the
know can make social media more
compulsive than fun.*

- ✓ Constant communication
- ✓ FOMO
- ✓ Sneaky tech tricks
- ✓ Superficial social contracts
- ✓ Information overload



The Multitasking Myth and Mental Health

- Switching between two tasks rapidly is known to decrease performance.
- Teens are usually better at switching between two tasks but it still tires the brain and performance drops.
- Hippocampus impacted (learning and memory) when brain of rats stimulated by multiple screens. Took mice 3x as long to learn a maze, and brain changes remained.
- Balancing screen use for school and home can be hard to manage and can lead to more multitasking.
- If performance decreases, it can cause depression.

Christakis and Ramirez, et al., 2012



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More Pressure = Less Sleep

- 60% of adolescents view phones within the hour before bedtime.
- According to a 2015 CDC study, 73% of teens (across 30 states) and 58% of middle schoolers (across nine states) don't get enough sleep.
- Devices (like phones) with blue light can reduce quality of kids' sleep even more than for adults.
- Lack of sleep can significantly impact mental health.

CDC, 2015; Hysing, et al., 2015



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Effects of On-call Communication and Never-ending Notifications

I have to know what's going on or I'll have FOMO.

If I don't keep tabs on what's happening on social media, I'll be left out so sometimes I stay up really late.

If I don't keep up, I'll miss out or be replaced.

If I don't respond to a text or keep up a Snapstreak, I'm letting my friends down so I multitask while doing homework.

I have to keep checking for better or worse.

My notifications might make me feel good or bad, but I have to know either way.



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How To Help

Know that the pressure feels real, so lead with empathy.
"I bet sometimes it feels hard to keep up with all of this."

Encourage your teen to limit notifications.
"Let's take a look in your settings and see if we can adjust how urgent it seems."

Take a break.
Even a short break can give some relief.

Set limits to help your kid contain demands for communication.
"As a family, we're not using phones at the table or in bed."

Be a strong role model for healthy behavior.
"It's hard for me, too. Maybe we can help each other."



Myth or Truth? Parents spend less time on devices than kids/teen.



Myth!

Parents spend 9 hrs., 22 mins with screen media daily, including for personal and work use; 7:43 of that time is devoted to personal screen time.

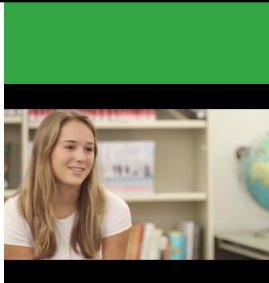
6 Hrs Tweens spend an average of six hours/day on screens.

9 Hrs Teens spend an average of nine hours/day on screens.

Drama

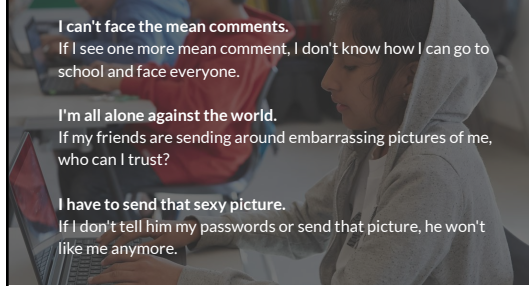
Between being left out, cyberbullying, and significant others, social media can be stressful.

- ✓ Mean girls and misunderstandings
- ✓ Cyberbullying and cruelty can be crushing
- ✓ Significant others and sexting



Clip from AT&T's
There's a Soul Behind That Screen

Effects of Meanness, Embarrassment, and Fear of Rejection



I can't face the mean comments.
If I see one more mean comment, I don't know how I can go to school and face everyone.

I'm all alone against the world.
If my friends are sending around embarrassing pictures of me, who can I trust?

I have to send that sexy picture.
If I don't tell him my passwords or send that picture, he won't like me anymore.

How To Help

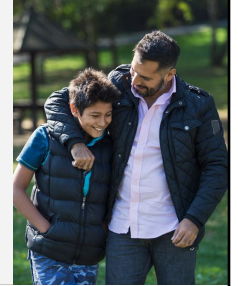
Stay engaged, empathic, and encouraging.
"I'm right here with you, and I know this is hard."

Help teens think through potential consequences of posting and sharing.
"How do you think she'll feel if that picture gets around school?"

Collect evidence, block, report, and involve institutions when necessary.

Encourage teens to be upstanders and create a positive online culture.

"I know it might feel scary, but I'll bet she'd like someone to have her back."



Treading Carefully With Teens



Judge



Jump to
Conclusions

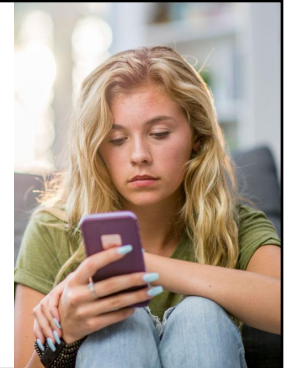


Jump into
Action

Isolation

Sometimes being in the digital world feels easier than being face-to-face and strangers feel safer than friends.

- ✓ Online world becomes more important than offline world
- ✓ Digital device demands all time -- no desire to do anything else
- ✓ Dramatic changes in mood, grades, and social circle
- ✓ Secrecy and lack of in-person relationships can mean contact with strangers

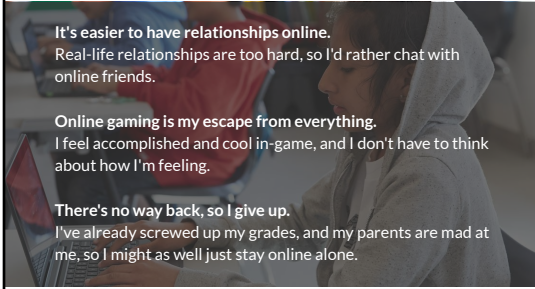


Effects of Being Online to Exclusion of Everything Else

It's easier to have relationships online.
Real-life relationships are too hard, so I'd rather chat with online friends.

Online gaming is my escape from everything.
I feel accomplished and cool in-game, and I don't have to think about how I'm feeling.

There's no way back, so I give up.
I've already screwed up my grades, and my parents are mad at me, so I might as well just stay online alone.



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How To Help

Address underlying causes before taking away devices completely.

"I notice that you prefer to just stay in your room lately, and I'm curious about why that is. What's going on?"

Keep devices out of private spaces.

"We're all going to charge our phones in the living room at night so we can get better sleep."

Remind teens that online friends are different from face-to-face friends.

"I believe your online friends are real friends, and also to really know a person, you need to see them face-to-face."

Bring time online back into overall balance.

"As a family we're going to set some limits around when and where we use devices."



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Be the bridge:
Help your teen find their way back step by step.



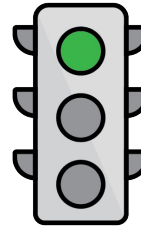
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Worst-Case Warning Signs: What to look for and what to do

Time to Watch

Typical Tween/Teen Development:

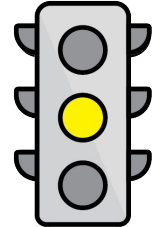
- Popularity and pecking order
- Growing independence and distancing from family
- Concern about appearance, especially in the eyes of peers
- Strong and swinging emotions
- Exploration of sexuality
- Trying on different identities
- Lack of consideration for consequences



Time to Ask

Changes in behavior, achievement, contact with friends:

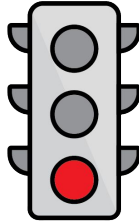
- Anxious and on edge after being online
- More irritable and prone to emotional outbursts
- Secretive in general and about time online, hiding the screen, glued to phone
- Withdrawn and wanting to be alone more than usual



Time to Get help

Clear warning signs:

- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts/ideation
- Increased withdrawal
- Grades dropping
- Sleeping and eating changes
- Increased crying
- Hidden depression/anxiety



Other Ways to Gauge



Mental Health Pain Scale:

- Like the 1–10 pain scale used by doctors but for mental health
- Can be easy shorthand for you and your teen
- Anywhere on the scale from 5–10 is time to intervene

HEADSS

HEADSS Assessment

- Home
- Education
- Activities
- Drugs
- Sexuality
- Suicide/Depression

Risk Factors for Suicide

- A recent or serious loss
- An already identified psychiatric disorder
- Prior self-harm or suicide attempt
- Substance abuse or other high-risk behavior
- Having disciplinary problems
- Struggling with sexual orientation in an unsupportive environment
- Family history of suicide, abuse, neglect, or domestic violence
- Lack of social support
- Bullying
- Access to guns or pills
- Stigma around asking for help
- Difficulty getting help because of finances or language barriers
- Males more frequently complete the act

Protective Factors

- Strong connections to family and friends
- Problem-solving abilities
- Restricted access to guns and pills
- Cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide
- Access to intervention
- Future-oriented goals
- Self-esteem and a sense of purpose

The Next Steps When They're Struggling

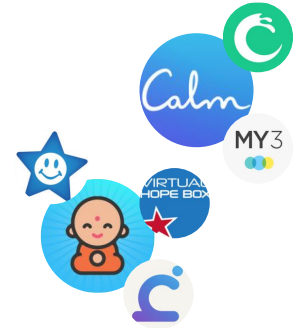
- Calm, non-accusatory approach
- Express your love -- a lot
- Empathy and validation
- Getting help shows strength
- Find positive ways to connect
- Minimize conflict
- Know your kid's friends
- Stay in touch
- Talk openly about it, even though it's scary
- Seek professional help

Here are some things you can say:

"I've noticed (name the concerning behavior). It seems like maybe you're going through a hard time. I really want to hear about what's happening for you. If you'd rather talk to someone else, that's OK, too. We can do whatever you need. It might feel like you're alone, but you're not. I'm right here with you, and I love you very much."

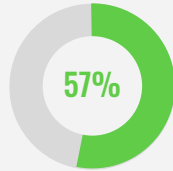
Digital Resources For On-the-Spot Support

- Calm
- My Gratitude Journal
- HappiMe for Young People
- Calm Harm
- My3
- Virtual Hope Box
- Pacifica for Stress & Anxiety



Potential Positives: What's the good news?

Myth or Truth? Social media alienates teens.



Myth!

57 percent of all teens have made new friends online.

68%

Of teen social media users have had online friends support them through tough or challenging times.

84%

Of boys who play networked games with friends feel more connected when they play online.

70%

of teens use social media multiple times each day.

Over
70%

of teens don't feel better or worse after social media use.

25%

of teens feel less lonely after social media use.

16%

of teens feel less depressed after social media use.

12%

of teens feel less anxious after social media use.

18%

of teens feel better about themselves after social media use.

The Sunny Side of the Street

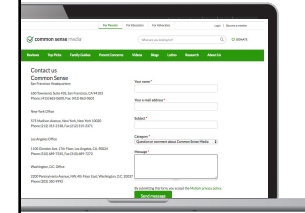
- Teens can connect, find their people, and feel *less* isolated.
- Both social media and gaming offer opportunities to be creative critical thinkers and build 21st century skills.
- When used in balance -- and together -- both social media and digital games can help families connect.

Be There and Show You Care!



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Thank You



Ancillary slides



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Case Study #1

- Jen is a 13-year-old 7th grader whose parents complain of recent moodiness. With a computer in her room, she stays there most of the day. She only comes out to have dinner with the rest of her family. She spends a lot of time "scrolling" on social media.
- She has been staying after school to hang out with a new group of friends, and the other day, she came home smelling of marijuana. When asked if she had been smoking she said that "one of her friends did", but that she would never do that.
- She has always been a good student, and is maintaining her grades at school.

Case Study #2

- Josefina is a 17-year-old Junior in a competitive Silicon Valley high school, who would be the first to attend college in her family.
- She is a straight-A student, but has needed it to stay up until 1-2 AM to complete her homework. Her GPA is 4.3 and she is hoping to get into an Ivy League college, but she is so stressed out that she has difficulty falling asleep. When asked why, she says her head is just flooded with images of all the things she needs to do. She wants help, but her parents (who are Latino immigrants) don't know where to start.
- Previously a very active girl, she is now more sedentary and spends what little free time she has watching TV.

Courtesy of Dr. Neville Golden, Stanford Children's Health
