

# The Impact of Social Media on Teens' Mental Health

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Social media has some good intentions—connecting you with people all around the world, showing you content you are interested in, providing endless entertainment—but there are also negative consequences to endless scrolling. Research has shown that young adults who use social media are three times as likely to suffer from [depression](#)—putting a large portion of the population at risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

In the U.S., suicide rates have declined slightly since 2019, but it continues to be a serious concern among our younger generation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of suicides in females aged 15-24 increased 87 percent over the past 20 years. And among males aged 15-24, the number of suicides rose by 30 percent over that same time period.

Almost every teen now has an account on at least one social media platform. They use social media to reach out to friends, share experiences, and tell the world about themselves. However, without realizing it, they are managing an addiction.

[Jessica Holzbauer](#), a licensed clinical social worker at [Huntsman Mental Health Institute](#), explains how our smartphones are, by design, addictive. “We get a dopamine release in our brain when we pick up our phone or log into social media,” she says. Using social apps is essentially priming your brain into thinking you are rewarding yourself every time you pick up your device.

## Negative Impacts of Social Media

Is it true that using social apps could negatively affect your mental health?

“In short, yes, social media can have negative consequences for our mental health,” Holzbauer says. “The younger generation grew up with social media and the ability to see anything, anytime, anywhere. Our ability to tolerate the distress of waiting has been eroded because we can Google the answer to almost any question. We no longer have to wait to know who was the actor that played Ron Burgundy in Anchorman or where to find the nearest library.”

In many ways, social media has removed the barriers between the user and the audience, with far-reaching implications. “We can act on impulse and post something to social media that may reflect a feeling or thought in the moment but may not be true to us a day later,” Holzbauer says. “When our more level-headed self is back in charge, we can feel embarrassment, shame, or regret for posting something impulsively.”

We also know that content can be filtered, edited, and manipulated before it's posted, which can lead to unattainable standards being broadcast to the entire world for anyone to see. Users are obsessed with instant gratification and in some instances base their worth or image off the images they see and the amount of likes they receive on their post.

“The information teens are putting out is one factor—another is the information they are taking in,” Holzbauer says. “Social media is giving them access to images, people, and ideas they otherwise would not be able to access. This can be a very positive thing, but we know it can also have negative consequences.”

A [recent study from Facebook](#) found Instagram to have harmful effects among a portion of its millions of young users, particularly teenage girls. Findings indicated that Instagram makes body image issues worse for one in three teenage girls. And among teenagers who reported suicidal thoughts, 6 percent in the U.S. traced them back to Instagram.

## Warning Signs Your Teen Is Struggling

This is not to say that keeping teens from social media will keep teens from having suicidal thoughts. Instead, it is a call for parents to be aware of what their kids are doing online—and to look for any changes in their child’s behavior.

“If your child is starting to focus too much of their attention on social media at the expense of real-life interactions, parents should be concerned,” Holzbauer says. “At the very least, this should spark a conversation about the behaviors to ensure there aren’t more serious issues going on like bullying, [anxiety](#), or other issues.”

Parents should also look for behaviors not necessarily related to social media that may signal a problem. If a teen is acting differently, seems disinterested in life, or is talking about not wanting to live, actions should be taken. It can be [a hard conversation to have](#)—but it might save their life.

Parents aren’t the only ones who should be on alert. Friends should also be aware when it appears someone is in trouble. They may even have more insight into the situation because they are sharing social media experiences and seeing similar content. One thing all teens should know is that if a friend appears to be considering suicide, they should not write it off as someone being “dramatic” or seeking attention. Be sure to tell someone if you see concerning behavior online and know the resources available.

## Tips for Healthy Social Media Use

We all know how the algorithm works—the more you look at your phone, the more it will send compelling content to keep your eyes from looking away. It’s hard to break habits of checking TikTok or Instagram and constantly refreshing to see more, but it’s important to take time away for our mental and physical health. Parents can set a good example through their own virtual behavior. Here are a few things you can do:

1. **Delete the social media apps from your phone.** You don’t have to delete your account, but deleting the apps from your phone will take away the urge to refresh the page every time you unlock your device.
2. **Leave devices at home.** Spend time with your friends and family and leave the devices at home. We all know how hard it is to ditch your phone, but try it and you will find how much more present you are with your surroundings.
3. **Disable your notifications.** Head to your settings portal and turn off notifications from your social media apps. Without the constant reminders, you will find yourself checking in less.
4. **Limit time.** Turn time controls on so that when you reach your limit, you are kicked out of the app.

[988](#), the national suicide and crisis lifeline, is available anytime, anywhere. Simply call, chat or text 9-8-8 for an immediate response from a licensed mental health professional. In Utah, students also have access to the [SafeUT app](#) where they can chat confidentially or submit a tip about themselves or a friend.