

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Social Media and Suicide Risk

Social media platforms have transformed the way people communicate, connect, and share their experiences. While social media can foster community and provide support, it can also contribute to increased risks for individuals vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Understanding the relationship between social media and suicide risk is crucial for prevention efforts and promoting safe online environments.

The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

Social media usage can have both beneficial and harmful effects on mental health. On the positive side, many individuals use platforms to find support groups, access resources, and share their recovery journeys. However, excessive time online, exposure to toxic or triggering content, and feelings of inadequacy fueled by comparison can lead to increased stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Research shows that high-frequency users, especially adolescents and young adults, are more likely to report mental health struggles and thoughts of self-harm.¹ The curated nature of social media content can create unrealistic expectations, harm self-esteem, and contribute to feelings of isolation.

Recognizing Warning Signs Online

Identifying digital warning signs of suicidal ideation is a key step in prevention. Posts or messages that mention hopelessness, worthlessness, unbearable pain, or withdrawal from relationships may signal emotional crisis. Sudden changes in posting behavior, such as going silent or sharing cryptic or despairing content, should also be noted. These signs may appear subtle or be dismissed as venting, but they can indicate deeper emotional distress. Recognizing patterns over time, rather than isolated posts, can help clarify when someone may be in need of support. Friends, peers, and followers are often the first to notice these shifts and can play a vital role by checking in, expressing concern, and encouraging professional help.²

Resources

Common Sense Media

- Provides age-based reviews and guidance on social media platforms, apps, and technology, helping families make informed digital choices.

KiDS: Keep it Digitally Safe

- A national initiative by the Public Health Advocacy Institute providing resources for parents, educators, and youth to promote digital well-being and reduce social media-related harms.

Unite for Safe Social Media

- A collaborative campaign working to hold social media companies accountable and push for safer online environments through education, advocacy, and policy change.

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Responding to Concerning Content

If you come across posts or messages that suggest someone may be at risk for suicide, it's important to respond with care and responsibility. Here are key steps to take:

- Reach out to the individual privately to express concern and offer support.
- Encourage them to talk to a trusted friend, family member, or mental health professional.
- If the situation seems urgent or the person is in immediate danger, contact emergency services right away.
- Use platform-specific tools to report harmful content or behavior—this can alert moderators and connect the person with crisis resources.³

Promoting Safe Online Spaces

Platforms, users, and communities share responsibility for creating safer online environments. Social media companies have increased efforts to implement content monitoring, crisis helplines, and algorithm adjustments to reduce exposure to harmful material. Users can support prevention by promoting positive messaging, sharing mental health resources, and advocating for respectful dialogue. Education about online safety and digital literacy can empower users to navigate social media more safely.⁴

The Role of Parents, Educators, and Trusted Adults

Trusted adults have a unique opportunity to shape how young people engage with social media. Open and ongoing conversations about online behavior, emotional well-being, and digital safety help build trust and resilience. Parents and caregivers should stay informed about the platforms their children use, understand how algorithms and trends can affect mental health, and model healthy screen habits. Educators can incorporate digital citizenship into classrooms, empowering students to recognize harmful content, support peers, and know when and how to ask for help. A proactive approach can ensure that young users are not navigating these spaces alone.⁵

References

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ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



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