

Social Media and Suicide Risk

Suicide rates of young people are now at an all-time high. Since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began reporting suicide numbers in 1991, never have the nation's young people had such intense challenges – one of which is navigating social media and its impact on their daily lives. The National Institutes of Health reports that social media use by minors has significantly increased and has been linked to depression and suicidality.¹

The Role of Social Media in a Young Person's Life

Social media is defined as the exchange of information (texts, videos, and more) on the internet. Common platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok. About 84 percent of teens use social media, and there is a growing concern about tweens (8 to 12 year olds) also engaging in online activities. The pandemic has caused a large shift in usage numbers. For example:

- From 2015 to 2019, social media use for tweens grew only three percent, and for teens, 11 percent. But from 2019 to 2021 alone, social media use grew by 17 percent for tweens and teens.
- Also in this time frame, social media use among 8- to 12-year-olds increased to about five and a half hours of social media per day, while 13- to 18-year-olds use increased to about eight and a half hours of use per day. This does not include time spent on homework online.
- Since 2019, time spent watching online videos, using social media, and browsing websites had the biggest increases.²

How Social Media Impacts the Brain

Depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and suicide have all soared as the nation becomes more and more connected and, in some cases, addicted to their devices. In fact, of those 84 percent of young people who use social media, only 34 percent stated that they enjoy using it.²

Social media can bring connection, creativity, friendship, and peer interaction. However, the world of violent and hateful speech, addictive algorithms, low self-esteem, poor body image, cyberbullying, and sextortion all are related to platforms targeting young brains. But young people are ill-prepared to decipher, interpret, and think maturely about addictive content. They are also at risk of being exposed to harmful and predatory actions.



“As we work with families who have been impacted by suicide through loss or youth attempts, social media use is a common topic of conversation in their children’s worsening mental health. Educating parents and youth about the impacts of social media use will play a role in improving youth mental health wellness.”
- Tony Coder, OSPF Executive Director

For more information on the Social Media Parental Notification Act, visit governor.ohio.gov/administration/lt-governor/020823

Cyberbullying is anonymous, vicious, relentless, and dangerous. Up to 46 percent of teens reported being cyberbullied at some point in their young lives.³ These platforms also allow anonymous profiles and predators to have easy access to unsuspecting kids. With little accountability or protection in place, young people are left dealing with abuse online on their own, causing them to feel isolated and hopeless. These situations are often intense and can drive one to suicide, and they are more frequent now than ever before. In Ohio, the Internet Crimes against Children Task Force received 650 cyber tips in 2009. In 2022, 12,000 tips were reported.

Social Media Parental Notification Act

Ohio passed the Social Media Parental Notification Act in July, 2023 as part of the State Operating Budget-House Bill 33. The Social Media Parental Notification Act was championed by Governor Mike DeWine and Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted, which would require certain online companies to obtain verifiable parental or legal guardian consent to contractual terms of service before permitting kids under the age of 16 to use their platforms. Under the proposal, companies must:

- Create a method to determine whether the user is a child under the age of 16
- Obtain verifiable parental or legal guardian consent if the user is under the age of 16
- Send written confirmation of the consent to the parent or legal guardian

Companies such as Facebook (Meta), Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, etc. will have to comply with the new law by January 15, 2024.

Lowering the Risk

Parents, family members and friends, watch for a change in a child's behavior when using social media.

No matter what age, discussion about the dangers when using social media must happen. Detail the addictive qualities and the intentional app designs targeted to keep them online. Clearly explain that all is not real on the internet; people may not be who they say they are nor look the way they appear on social media. Set reasonable limits on screen time. Reducing time on devices is the most effective way to reduce the risk of harm.

If you believe your child might be experiencing a crisis, you can call or text the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.

Resources

- Families Against Social Media Addiction socialmedia4good.net
- Stop Bullying stopbullying.gov
- Cyberbullying Research Center cyberbullying.org
- Child Mind Institute. childmind.org

References

- 1 National Institutes of Health. The role of online social networking on deliberate self-harm and suicidality in adolescents: A systematized review of literature. 2018. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6278213/
- 2 Common Sense. The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9054427
- 3 Pew Research Center. Teens and Cyberbullying 2022. www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/12/15/teens-and-cyberbullying-2022/

ABOUT OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

OSPF gives hope to those in crisis, strength to those in the struggle, and comfort to those in grief. OSPF is a non-profit organization that works tirelessly to help all of Ohio's communities reduce the risk of suicide. Our work includes supporting those impacted by suicide, raising awareness of mental health issues, and coordinating community resources and evidence-based prevention strategies across the state.



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