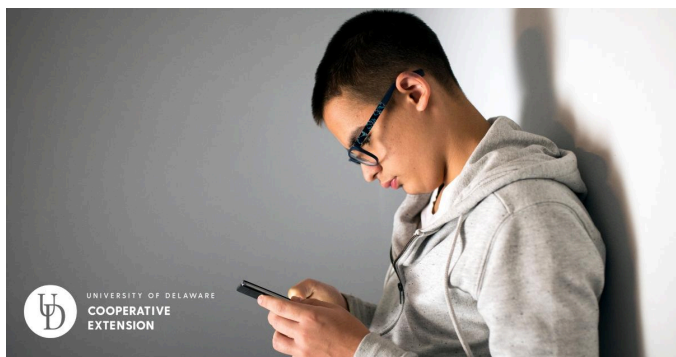




Social Media in Adolescence

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Social media is a prominent part of many people's lives today, especially among youth. About 95% of people between the ages of 13-17 report using it. While social media platforms can offer opportunities for connection, creativity, and entertainment, research also links frequent social media use to mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, body image issues, and feelings of isolation. It can also interfere with sleep, focus, and daily responsibilities. By teaching young people how to use social media mindfully and safely, we can help them avoid these negative impacts and support their overall well-being.

Social media literacy:

To help your child use social media safely and responsibly, it's important to build your own understanding of social media literacy. The term "social media literacy" means learning how social media messages can shape thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

What do you need to know about social media?

- Social media is not the same as real life. Likes, comments, and posts do not always accurately reflect how people think and feel.
- Most images online are edited, filtered, and staged. Everyone has challenges and flaws that are not shown on social media. Avoid

comparing yourself to these unrealistic images.

- Many messages shared on social media may be false or intentionally misleading. Always fact-check what you see by checking the source, looking for alternative viewpoints, and asking: Is this person a credible expert?
- Posts with many likes can be especially persuasive, even if those likes come from bots or people who don't truly agree with the content. A high number of likes doesn't mean something is true or trustworthy.
- There is a business behind social media. These platforms are designed to keep users engaged for as long as possible. They collect data on what users post, like, and view to influence their behavior and maximize profits.

What can you do to help your child?

1. Teach your child social media literacy. By learning how to spot false, misleading, or harmful content, your child will be better equipped to use social media in a safer way. You can make learning social media literacy fun with online games like getbadnews.com and spotthetroll.org.
2. Build a relationship of trust and openness with your child. Let them know they can come to you without fear of judgment or punishment. If you have a relationship built on trust and communication, your child is more likely to share what they're seeing and experiencing online.
3. Set healthy boundaries around social media use. Doing so can help your child develop

good habits and reduce exposure to harmful content. Many platforms offer built-in tools that allow you to set time limits and manage what your child can see. If these features aren't available within the app itself, third-party tools and parental control apps can help you monitor usage, set daily screen time limits, and filter out inappropriate content.

4. Promote in-person relationships and meaningful digital connections. Encourage your child to use social media primarily for connecting with friends and family, rather than for passively scrolling. Features on social media such as video calls, direct messages, and group chats can help your child develop positive relationships.
5. Be a role model for responsible social media use. Your child learns how to use social media by watching you. Show healthy habits by setting screen time boundaries for yourself and being present during family time. Post thoughtfully and respectfully, and avoid sharing misinformation or engaging in online conflict.
6. Prevent the spread of cyberbullying. Teach your child how to recognize harmful behavior online such as hurtful comments, threats, exclusion, or sharing embarrassing content. Emphasize the importance of treating others with kindness and respect, both online and offline. Let your child know they should come to you or another trusted adult if they witness or experience cyberbullying.
7. Talk to other parents/caregivers. Communicate about setting similar expectations for screen time, appropriate content, and respectful online behavior. Consider starting conversations at school events, parent-teacher meetings, or through group chats to share strategies and concerns. You can also advocate for school or community-based programs that promote media literacy and mental health.

8. Watch out for problematic social media use behaviors. If social media is negatively impacting your child's routines, social life, sleep, physical activity, and/or their mental health, you may need to set additional limitations on their social media use. Consider seeking help from a mental health professional if necessary.

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