Social Media & Mental Health

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.

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

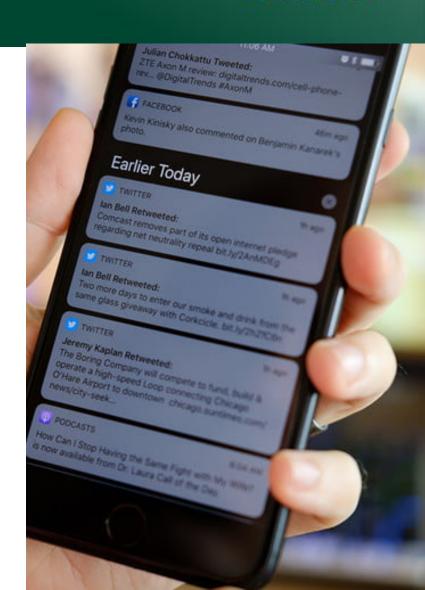✓ Social media metrics available 24/7

✓ Strong Political views

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

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

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

9 hrs
22 mins

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.

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.
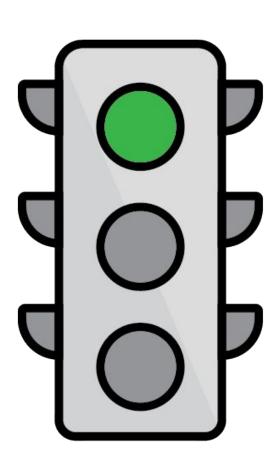
There's no way back, so I give up.

I've already screwed up my grades, and my parents are mad at me, so I might as well just stay online alone.

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

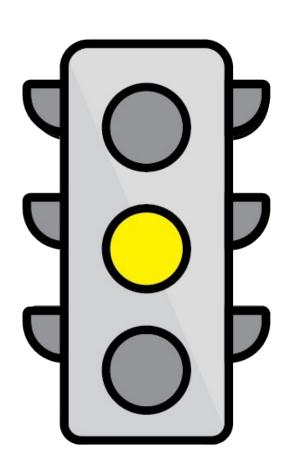- Lack of consideration for consequences

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

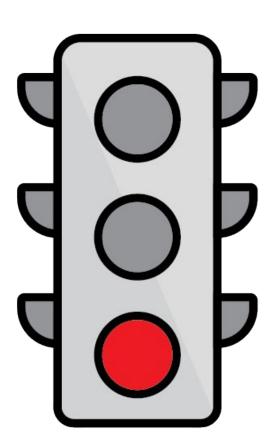- Withdrawn and wanting to be alone more than usual

Time to Get help

Clear warning signs:

- Self-harm

- Suicidal thoughts/ideation

- Increased withdrawal

- Grades dropping

- Sleeping and eating changes

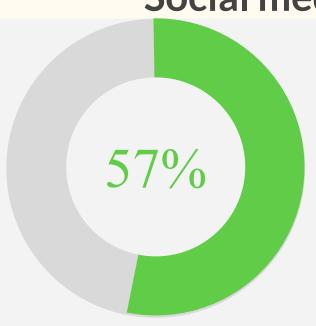- Increased crying

- Hidden depression/anxiety

Potential Positives:
What's the good news?

Myth or Truth?
Social media alienates teens.

57%

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.