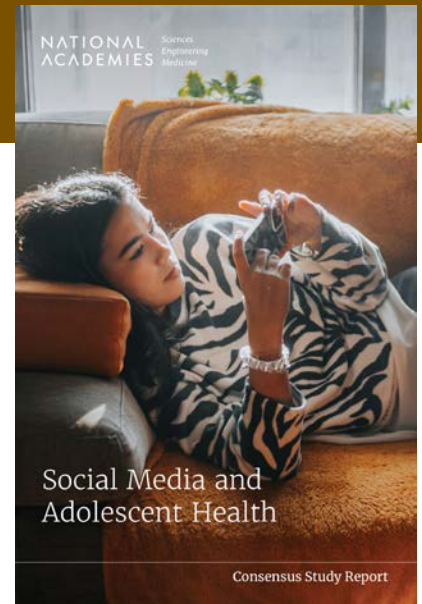


Social Media and Adolescent Health

Key Takeaways for Parents

A recent National Academies consensus study examined current research about social media's effects on the mental and physical health of young people. The resulting report calls for a better understanding of social media's influence on development and makes recommendations for policymakers and other leaders in the categories of design, training and education, online harassment, and research. Below are several key takeaways for parents.



■ Pros and Cons

Social media can have both positive effects, such as fostering a sense of community—especially among minority identity groups—and negative effects, such as exposing a person to harassing behavior or fringe ideas. Parents should weigh the pros and cons for their own adolescent children, taking into account each child's maturity and circumstances.

■ Setting Rules

Experts agree that respect for a young person's privacy and autonomy should gradually increase over time. This applies to social media as well as other areas of a teen's life. When establishing guardrails for use, parents should consider that the balance of good and bad found on social media depends on how a platform is used. Setting rules requires tolerance for gray areas and sensitivity to a child's needs.

■ Talk With Your Teen

Initiating regular discussions about social media use is critical. Parents should talk with their children about how they are using social media and look for occasions to address risks like oversharing, harassment, and forming skewed perceptions. Parents should also be mindful of social media's potential to replace other important activities such as face-to-face time with friends, sports, schoolwork, and especially sleep.

■ Signs of Problematic Use

Understanding a young person's baseline emotional and behavioral state is also very important, because only then will parents be able to spot changes. Heightened intensity of emotions and disengagement from friends, schoolwork, or hobbies could all be warning signs of problematic social media use or gaming addiction—as they are for any number of mental and physical health conditions.