

Unhealthy Overuse of Social Media:

How to Address the Problem

- **INCREASING SCREEN TIME:** On average, teenagers spend about 9 hours per day online, much of which is spent on non-educational activities (*Common Sense Media, 2015*).
- **SLEEP DISRUPTION:** Children and teens need between 8-12 hours of sleep each night. Cell phone use at night can impact sleep quantity and quality. Adequate sleep is vital to growing brains.
- **EXPOSURE TO INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR:** Cell phones are used to access social media and children and teens can be exposed to a variety of unhealthy behaviors, including bullying.
- **MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT:** Research is emerging in this area but suggests that exposure to unhealthy behaviors (e.g., suicidal behaviors, restrictive eating behaviors) may promote modeling of those behaviors among youth, especially when youth observe these behaviors being reinforced, which can lead to increased risk for significant mental health issues.
- **SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE:** A significant portion of teenagers' cell phone use is spent on social media platforms. Research shows that about 30% of teens report using social media sites almost constantly, and about half of teens use Instagram and Snapchat daily (*Pew, 2023*). American teens typically spend about 5 hours per day on hours per day on various social media platforms (*Gallup, 2023*).

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Social media use isn't inherently bad. In fact, it has important benefits. But limits are important. Parents should consider:

- **MODEL RESPONSIBLE USE:** Limit your own phone use during family time or meals to model healthy behavior for your children.
- **SET A FAMILY MEDIA USE PLAN:** Use the resources at Common Sense Media to help your family develop a technology use plan that keeps everyone accountable.
- **TEACH SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY:** For younger kids, adults should actively monitor social media use, discussing content and coaching kids about what they are consuming. For older teens, balance this with the need for privacy. Provide freedom gradually, as kids age, gain more digital literacy skills, and demonstrate responsible use of social media.
- **LEARN ABOUT THE RISKS:** Refer to the American Psychological Association's guidance on technology use to inform yourself and your children about the impact of excessive screen time.
- **WATCH OUT FOR PROBLEMATIC USE:** Technology use that affects kids' ability to engage in daily routines and relationships can lead to serious psychological issues.

Resources

1. American Psychological Association (APA) Health advisory on social media use in adolescence
2. Helping kids safely and responsibly manage cell phone use and safely use various forms of social media
3. How to teach social media literacy to teens