

Social Media and Youth Mental Health

Your Mental Health in Balance brought to you by your Family of Parishes Mental Health Ministry

It can be difficult for adults who grew up without or with limited social media to understand why it's so important to young people. While it might not seem important to you, social media matters to youth and is a very real part of our world—so it's important to understand the unique pressures and challenges they face because of it.

Most teens who view social media as generally positive, emphasized its role in keeping in touch and interacting with others. Yet, fifty-nine percent of US teens have personally experienced abusive online behaviors. So how do we as parents help cultivate healthy social media use?

Parents and schools have a tough job—the goal isn't to keep students off social media altogether, but to support them in developing healthy social media behaviors. Try these suggestions:

Celebrate the positives. When youth feel judged or misunderstood about their social media use, they're likely to get defensive or shut down.

Ask questions. Instead of starting conversations by talking about the harms or effects of social media, be open and curious about their unique experiences with it.

Promote limiting screen time. Excessive time on the internet and social media has been linked to poorer mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Consider setting time limits or media-free zones. As children get older, support them in managing their own usage—encourage them to dedicate time to offline activities.



Model healthy use. Young people notice what adults are doing more than we may think, including being told to get off their devices while the adults in their life seem just as obsessed. Studies have shown that parental use of digital technology, rather than their attitudes toward it, determines how their children will engage with it.

Friend/follow your kids' accounts. Your kids—especially teenagers—might resist you monitoring their social media, but it's important that you're informed of what's happening in their online world. Explain your reasoning, listen to their hesitations, and let them set boundaries. Your virtual relationship with your child is an entirely new one, so be patient.

If social media use seems to be impacting the mental health of a child or teen in your life, suggest that they take a screen survey at www.mhascreening.org to determine if they might be experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. **Call 988 or chat 988lifeline.org. You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.**

**A great resource for finding balance and embracing the gifts of our digital age—
The Gift of Cultural Hurricanes: Tools to Rebuild Authentic Spirituality**, by Tim Hogan, PsyD

Dr. Tim Hogan helps sort through the hurry, worry, and disconnection of our current culture... and offers brain science, scripture, practical reflections, and strategies to capitalize on recapturing the present moment, gratitude, and emotionally intelligent love. Take time to read this as a gift to yourself and your family to help carve out new routines and develop deeper connections! Contact Cindy in the office for a copy!