

The Impact of Social Media on Youth Mental Health

A Summary of the 2023 U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory

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It should be noted that “advisories are reserved for **significant** public health challenges that require **immediate** awareness and action.”

Nearly
40%
of those aged 8-12
use it
(although 13 is often the
required minimum)

95%
of youth ages 13-17
**use social
media**
with many using it
“almost constantly”

“We do not have enough evidence to determine if social media is safe for children and adolescents.”

The influence of social media on youth mental health is shaped by many complex factors:



Time spent on platforms



Interactions social media affords



Type of content



Sleep & physical activity disruption

The above complexities must also consider the fact that each individual has unique strengths, vulnerabilities, and backgrounds. As Christians, we cannot overlook our sin nature and how that uniquely impacts all of this.

What's happening in the brain?

Ages 10-19 are undergoing a highly sensitive period of brain development when:



Risk-taking behavior reaches peak



Sense of well-being experiences greatest fluctuations



Mental health challenges such as depression emerges

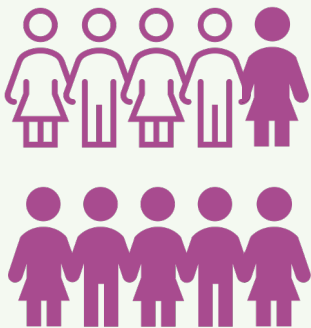
Benefits of social media:

- Community and connection
- Self-expression
- Relationships with more diverse peer groups

Potential harms of social media:

- More than 3 hours per day doubles the risk of depression & anxiety symptoms
- Findings from a study conducted on college-aged adolescents raises serious concerns for younger adolescents whose brains are less developed
- Limiting and deactivating social media has led to improved well-being

Nearly **6 in 10 girls** say they've been contacted by a stranger.



Risk from Content

Extreme, inappropriate, and harmful content is easily accessible through:

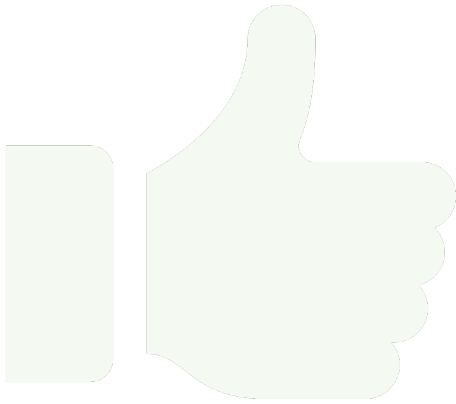
- Direct pushes
- Unwanted content exchanges
- Algorithmic designs

Social media also seems to perpetuate:

- Body dissatisfaction
- Disordered eating behaviors
- Social comparison
- Low self-esteem

“Nearly 3 in 4 teenagers believe that technology companies manipulate users to spend more time on their devices.”

Risk of Harm from excessive or problematic use



Platforms are often designed to maximize user engagement.

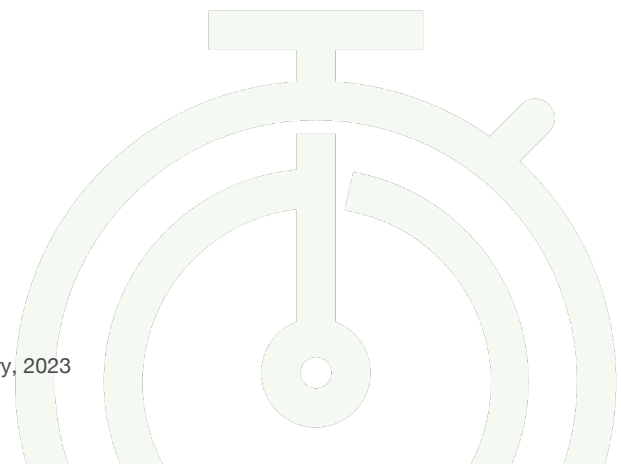
- Push notifications, autoplay, infinite scroll, quantifying popularity (i.e., ‘likes’), and algorithms that suggest recommendations draw the user back in.
- Researchers suggest that social media overstimulates the reward center in the brain, which triggers pathways comparable to addiction.

Average time

In a survey of 8th and 10th graders, the average is 3.5 hours/day with:

- 1 in 4 spending **5+ hours** per day
- 1 in 7 spending **7+ hours** per day

Source: [Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#), The U.S. Surgeon General Advisory, 2023



Reformed Youth Ministries exists to serve the Church in its efforts to reach and equip youth for Christ. Through its **conferences, training** and **resources**, everything RYM does is oriented to help churches as they seek to raise up the next generation of the Church with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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