

Media Use and Teens



- Both traditional and social media can provide exposure to new ideas and information, raising awareness of current events and issues.
- The exposure of adolescents through media to alcohol, tobacco use, or sexual behaviors is associated with earlier initiation of these behaviors.
- In addition to the number of hours an individual spends on social media, a key factor is how social media is used.
- Content that an adolescent chooses to post is shared with others, and the removal of such content once posted may be difficult or impossible.

Benefits of Media

Both traditional and social media can provide exposure to new ideas and information, raising awareness of current events and issues. Interactive media also can provide opportunities for the promotion of community participation and civic engagement. Students can collaborate with others on assignments and projects on many online media platforms. Social media can enhance access to valuable support networks, which may be particularly helpful for patients with ongoing illnesses, conditions, or disabilities. Research also supports the use of social media to foster social inclusion among users who may feel excluded or who are seeking a welcoming community: for example, those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex. Finally, social media may be used to enhance wellness and promote healthy behaviors, such as smoking cessation and balanced nutrition.

Risks of Media

Obesity

A first area of health concern is media use and obesity, especially TV. One study found that the odds of being overweight were almost 5 times greater for adolescents who watch more than 5 hours of TV per day compared with those who watch 0 to 2 hours. More recent studies have provided new evidence that watching TV for more than 1.5 hours daily was a risk factor for obesity, but only for children 4 through 9 years of age. Increased caloric intake via snacking while watching TV has been shown to be a risk factor for obesity. Having a TV in the bedroom continues to be associated with the risk of obesity.

Sleep

Evidence suggests that media use can negatively affect sleep. Studies show that those with higher social media use or who sleep with mobile devices in their rooms were at greater risk of sleep disturbances. Exposure to light (particularly blue light) and activity from screens before bed affects melatonin levels and can delay or disrupt sleep.

Gaming

Children who overuse online media are at risk of problematic internet use, and heavy users of video games are at risk of internet gaming disorder. Symptoms can include a preoccupation with the activity, decreased interest in offline or “real life” relationships, unsuccessful attempts to decrease use, and withdrawal symptoms.

Academics

At home, many children and teenagers use entertainment media at the same time that they are engaged in other tasks, such as homework. A growing body of evidence suggests that the use of media while engaged in academic tasks has negative consequences on learning.



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Media Influence

Evidence gathered over decades supports links between media exposure and health behaviors among teenagers. The exposure of adolescents through media to alcohol, tobacco use, or sexual behaviors is associated with earlier initiation of these behaviors. Adolescents' displays on social media frequently include portrayal of health risk behaviors, such as substance use, sexual behaviors, self-injury, or disordered eating. Peer viewers of such content may see these behaviors as normative and desirable.

Cyberbullying, Sexting, and Online Solicitation

Cyberbullying and traditional bullying overlap, although online bullying presents unique challenges. These challenges include that perpetrators can be anonymous and bully at any time of day, that information can spread online rapidly, and that perpetrator and target roles can be quite fluid in the online world. Cyberbullying can lead to short- and long-term negative social, academic, and health consequences for both the perpetrator and the target. Fortunately, newer studies suggest that interventions that target bullying may reduce cyberbullying. "Sexting" is commonly defined as the electronic transmission of nude or semi-nude images as well as sexually explicit text messages. It is estimated that around 2% of youth aged 10 to 19 years have ever sent a sexual photo to someone else.

Social Media and Mental Health

Benefits from the use of social media in moderation include the opportunity for enhanced social support and connection. Research has suggested a U-shaped relationship between Internet use and depression, with increased risks of depression at both the high and low ends of Internet use. One study found that older adolescents who used social media passively (eg, viewing others' photos) reported declines in life satisfaction, whereas those who interacted with others and posted content did not experience these declines. Thus, in addition to the number of hours an individual spends on social media, a key factor is how social media is used.

Social Media and Privacy

Social media content that an adolescent chooses to post is shared with others, and the removal of such content once posted may be difficult or impossible. Most people vary in their understanding of privacy practices. Despite efforts by some social media sites to protect privacy or to delete content after it is viewed, privacy violations and unwelcome distribution are always risks.

What Can Families Do?

- Address what type of and how much media are used and what media behaviors are appropriate for each child or teenager, and for parents. Place consistent limits on hours per day of media.
- Promote that children and adolescents get the recommended amount of daily physical activity (1 hour) and adequate sleep (8–12 hours, depending on age).
- Recommend that children not sleep with devices in their bedrooms and avoid exposure to devices or screens for 1 hour before bedtime.
- Discourage entertainment media while doing homework.
- Designate media-free times together and media-free locations in homes.
- Communicate guidelines to other caregivers so that media rules are followed consistently.
- Have ongoing communication with children about treating others with respect online and offline, avoiding cyberbullying and sexting, being wary of online solicitation, and avoiding communications that can compromise personal privacy and safety.
- Develop a network of trusted adults who can engage with children through social media and to whom children can turn when they encounter challenges.

Connecticut Resources

Office of the Victim Advocate

https://www.ct.gov/ova/lib/ova/Internet_Safety_Brochure.pdf

National Resources

Healthychildren.org

Kidshealth.org

United States Department of Justice

<https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ceos/children-internet-safety>

