

The Digital Dilemma: Social Media's Adverse Impact on Youth



In March, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox signed S.B. 152 *Social Media Regulation Amendments*, sponsored by Sen. Mike McKell. The bill places restrictions on social media companies and provides parents with additional tools to protect teens from the harmful effects of social media. Utah is the first state to begin restricting how minors can use social media apps.

According to the Utah Senate website, since 2010, rates of depression and mental health crises in American teens have nearly doubled. Before that, the rates remained stagnant. Social media has been linked to these increased rates.

“In Utah, we care deeply about our teen’s mental health,” said Sen. McKell. “Since 2009, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation has drastically increased among minors in Utah and across the United States. After reviewing the data and talking with teens and parents, I decided to run S.B. 152 *Social Media Regulation Amendments*. Utah is leading the way to fight back against the harms of social media and providing parents with more resources and controls.”

An article cited in the Canadian Medical Association Journal shares evidence from various studies that implicates social media use in the increase of mental distress, self-injurious behavior, and suicide among youth. Other negative effects include chronic sleep-deprivation, lessened cognitive control, poor academic performance, cyberbullying, poor self-view, and a breakdown in interpersonal relationships.

Dr. Jack Resneck Jr., president of the American Medical Association, wrote, "With near universal social media use by America's young people, these apps and sites introduce profound risk and mental health harms in ways we are only now beginning to fully understand. As physicians, we see firsthand the impact of social media, particularly during adolescence – a critical period of brain development. We continue to believe in the positive benefits of social media, but we also urge safeguards and additional study of the positive and negative biological, psychological, and social effects."

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said, "Our children don't have the luxury of waiting years until we know the full extent of social media's impact. Their childhoods and development are happening now."

Murthy recommends the following ways to help families lessen the harms of social media.

Tips for parents and caregivers:

1. Create a family media plan. Have open discussions as a family about rules and setting boundaries for social media use. Establish tech-free zones, which will help foster in-person relationships and offline connections. Help youth develop social skills and nurture in-person relationships.
2. Model responsible online behavior. Show youth what it looks like to use social media in a healthy way. Teach by example how to exhibit positive behavior on social media accounts.

3. Teach youth how to share information safely and when and how to protect personal information. Discuss the benefits and risks of social media and the importance of respecting privacy. Discuss who they are connecting with, what their online experiences consist of, and how they spend their time online.

Tips for youth:

1. Reach out to a trusted friend or adult for help if you are negatively affected by social media. Visit stopbullying.gov for tips on how to report cyberbullying. If you have experienced online harassment and abuse by a dating partner, contact an expert at Love is Respect for support. If your private images have been shared online without your permission, visit Take It Down to help get the images removed.

2. Limit the use of technology. To ensure you get enough sleep, turn off devices at least one hour before bedtime and leave them off until morning. Keep your phone and other devices from intruding on mealtimes and gatherings by putting them away. This will help promote social connections and conversations with others. Make it a daily priority to connect with people in- person.

3. Carefully choose what you share online and with whom, as it may be stored permanently. When in doubt, don't post!

Additional Resources:

How to Help Teens with the Negative Impacts of Social Media

Teens and Social Media Use: What's the Impact?

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