**American Academeny of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Policy Statement on the Impact of Social Media on Youth Mental Health**

**Background**

Over the past decade, there has been a substantial increase in social media engagement among children and adolescents. This trend has been further amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, as social media and online gaming became the default method of socialization. Social media use is nearly universal among young people; up to 95% of teenagers are active online. Despite a minimum age requirement of 13 years on most U.S. platforms, nearly 40% of children aged 8-12 are on social media. In parallel with increasing social media engagement, rates of depression and anxiety among youth have surged, although this relationship is not fully understood. Given its ubiquitous nature, and the particularly important period of brain development between childhood and young adulthood, the impact of social media usage on youth mental health remains an important topic.

Children and adolescents are affected by social media in different ways depending on individual factors as well as trait strengths and vulnerabilities. Social media platforms do offer benefits to youth—they often serve as avenues for forging connections, receiving, and offering emotional support and expressing creativity. Youth in crisis are more likely to share suicidality on social media than directly to caregivers, concerned peers often alert adults, which frequently leads to vital referrals to emergency services and child and adolescent psychiatry. However, children and adolescents are also prone to experiencing adverse effects of social media, including disruptions of sleep which increase susceptibility to depression, fostering unrealistic social comparisons damaging self-esteem, adopting avoidant coping, cyberbullying, encouragement of eating-disordered behavior or self-harm, and sexual exploitation. For example, experimental research confirms that viewing idealized social media images can lead to body dissatisfaction among youth. At this time, there is enough evidence to conclude that social media can negatively impact the mental health of youth.

**To protect against the potential harmful effects of social media exposure on child and adolescent mental health, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) recommends:**

* Requiring technology companies to strengthen protections for youth online privacy, create effective controls allowing youth and caregivers to manage screen access and content, and share relevant data for further independent research on social media’s effect on youth mental health.
* Increasing federal funding for future research on the potential benefits and harms of social media use on youth mental health.
* Minimizing children’s and adolescents’ exposure to problematic content, including that which promotes self-harm, prejudice, cyberbullying, health misinformation, and unrealistic beauty- or appearance-related content.
* Collaborative engagement between social media platforms and child and adolescent psychiatrists, pediatricians, counsellors, teachers, and parents in the development of guidelines for age-appropriate content, safe and developmentally suitable functionalities, and the development of age-appropriate digital literacy training to precede social media engagement among children and adolescents.
* Encouraging caregivers to maintain ongoing discussions with youth about digital citizenship, potential pitfalls of social media, online safety, and family expectations. Caregivers should strongly consider restricting screens from bedrooms and establishing screen free periods at home such as during mealtimes, homework time, and the hour before bedtime.

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*The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry promotes the healthy development of children, adolescents, and families through advocacy, education, and research. Child and adolescent psychiatrists are the leading physician authority on children’s mental health.*

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