



Social Media Use Among Elementary and Teen Populations: Trends, Risks, and Strategies for Responsible Use

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The Early Years (2-6 yrs.)

- Inculcate a love of reading physical books first.
- Tablets and screen time should be avoided entirely or kept extremely constrained. They can crowd out an interest in books at this age and create a different habit of reading.
- Longform reading encourages focus and increases attention span.



Discerning Truth

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Media literacy is a skill developed over many years and across platforms. Without seeking information from books and sources OTHER than social media, we can develop a skewed worldview and suffer an inability to distinguish between lies, propaganda, and truth.

The impact of social media on our youth cannot be ignored.

YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat are the top social media platforms for tweens and teens. Tiktok, Instagram, and Snapchat tend to see particular use by certain users, while Twitch, Reddit, and YouTube are another group that sees overlapping use.

55% of U.S. teens believe they spend the right amount of time on social media, while 36% think they spend too much time.

Screen time increased by 17% from 2019 to 2021 for both tweens (ages 8-12) and teens (ages 13-18) .

**Among tweens, 38% use social media, up from 31% in 2019.
80% of middle school students report that they use social media for school assignments.**

These statistics show the upward trend in use, but didn't show how much time per day middle schoolers are spending on social media platforms. Anyone like to guess those numbers?

Pre-Covid Data

According to a 2019 study, tweens (ages 8-12) spent an average of nearly 5 hours per day on screen media for entertainment, which included social media use.

Girls in this age group spent an average of 4 hours and 55 minutes on screen, while boys spent 6 hours and 11 minutes.

In terms of social media specifically, children under 18 spent an average of 1 hour and 47 minutes on TikTok and 1 hour and 12 minutes on Snapchat daily.

How did we get here?

Intentional Design

Algorithmic Tracking

Gamification

Autoplay and Elimination of "Stopping Cues"





Here are some Post-Covid average screen time statistics for children and teens from various sources:

The average teenager spends around 7 hours and 22 minutes per day on the phone.

Children ages 8-18 spend 7.5 hours a day in front of screens for entertainment alone, which amounts to 114 days a year.

Children ages 8-10 spend around 6 hours per day in front of a screen, while children ages 11-14 spend about 9 hours a day on screens.

Most kids are spending more than five hours a day on social media or playing video games.

What are the repercussions of such use?

Nighttime use of devices that emit blue light is known to disrupt melatonin production and the quality of sleep. Feelings of inadequacy (especially in the area of body image), cyberbullying, anxiety and depression have all been correlated with high levels of social media use. The formation of habitual use can impede the healthy development of other skills and habits.

Cyberbullying and “Shunning”

24/7 (as opposed to 8 hrs a day when parents were growing up).

Anonymous / fake accounts.

Say things they wouldn't say face to face.

Comparison / Fear of Missing Out

Cyberbullying and “Shunning”

Highlight reels and “Rate Me” polls are havens for bullying.

90% teen girls edit photos before posting on Instagram.

Kids can see in real-time when they are being left out.

Encourage to limit time, unfollow, engage with positive content if they are going to be on social media.

Other Repercussions

Swatting texts and calls are felonies

**Tiktok challenges (assault, destruction of property, loss of life).
Cyberbullying and school violence.**

Between 33.8% and 73% of students between 12 and 17 report being victims of cyberbullying, while 11.5% of students between 12 and 17 indicated that they had engaged in cyberbullying in their lifetime.

Of those bullied, 44% said the bullying had taken place in the last 30 days.

Online Predators: Identifying the Warning Signs

No mutual friends.

Random letter/numbers in social media handle.

Following many accounts but having few followers.

Low snap score (how much that snapchat user has used snapchat).

Online predators and drugs dealers both create accounts, message kids, then delete those accounts to make it harder for law enforcement to track.

Asking for personal information.

Attempting to make the kid open up emotionally.

Responding to Online Predators

Get screenshots, social media handle, write out what happened.

500,000 online predators active online daily.

Contact law enforcement.

Reinforce the message of unconditional support and love for the child/victim.

What can be done to limit misuse and encourage development of responsible phone and social media habits?

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to monitor children's social media use, including:

Exercising direct physical control over the device and establishing boundaries on use that are ingrained as habits.

Restricting use to your personal account or an account you have direct control over.

Knowing their passwords, using parental control apps, and communicating openly are vital.

Popular parental control apps include Bark, Qustodio, Net Nanny, and FamiGuard, which each offer different features such as monitoring content, screen time, and location.

Many phones have setting functions that allow monitoring of time, restrictions, notification controls and nighttime display features.

Additional strategies:

Create a “Family Tech Agreement” that includes boundaries for parents.

Implement a “Digital Bedtime”.

Enable Apple Parental Controls (Family Sharing) or Google Family Link controls. Purchase a router with built in parental controls.

Model appropriate behavior on-line.

Use mistakes as learning opportunities.

Monitor and regulate Groupchats. The phone is your legal property, not your child's.

Social Media and AI: The Next Evolution

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The simple truth is we are about to see another sea change in social media use, facilitated by AI, in a multitude of barely conceivable ways:

Deepfake videos (Runway)

AI Voiceclones (Play.ht, ElevenLabs)

Photo blackmail and manipulation.

Digital Clones (Replika, cloned boyfriends/girlfriends)

How can we respond to these threats?

Education, Awareness, and Moral Formation. Learn to use the tools, so you know their limitations and begin to learn how to sight styles.

More careful, less public use of digital platforms.

Filtering of photos through programs like Photoguard, Glaze, and Fawkes meets with extremely limited success.

Press legislators for “identity rights” that criminalize the appropriation or misuse of our image, voice, and likeness.



Ultimately, all of these problems are moral problems and issues of character development.

Encourage the full development of our human abilities and relationships.

Spend time with your children and model and foster kindness.

SOURCES

All Images were created by Greg Miller through the use of generative AI (Midjourney and Dall-E 3).

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- ▶ [Survey: Most kids spend more than 5 hours a day on social media or video games | WKRC \(local12.com\) \(Obtained on August 12th, 2023\)](#)
- ▶ [Social Media In The Classroom Statistics \[Fresh Research\] • Gitnux \(Obtained on August 12th, 2023\)](#)
- ▶ [Enough Is Enough: Cyberbullying \(Obtained on August 12th, 2023\)](#)
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- ▶ [Online Predator Statistics \[2023 Update\] \(screenandreveal.com\) \(Obtained on October 23rd, 2023\)](#)
- ▶ [**Cyberbullying and Adolescent Suicide** \(Obtained on September 6th, 2024\)](#)
- ▶ [**Best Routers with Parental Controls for 2024** \(Obtained on September 12th, 2024\)](#)