

Parents may fret, but even experts say social media use has its benefits

By Asha Davis and Erin Burnett, USA Today, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.20.18

Word Count **673**

Level **850L**



Experts say there are some positive aspects to social media, including staying connected to people. It all depends on how students use it.
Photo by: Maskot/Getty Images

Many teens spend time on social media sites posting about their world. Their lives seem almost perfect.

In real life, however, their lives might not be so perfect.

Social media lets teenagers connect all over the world. Still, the hours spent on Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites could be harmful, experts say.

Too Much Social Media Is Not Healthy

Studies show links between an overuse of social media and health problems. Those can include anxiety and body image issues.

It is estimated that 75 percent of teenagers in America today are on social media sites. Some teens feel anxious if they can't update their status or find out what their friends are doing. They might

have trouble relaxing. They also may judge their own worth by how many Snapchat followers they have.

"One of the biggest challenges for teenagers is the fear of missing out or the need to feel accepted," said Shreya Hessler. She is a psychologist in Bel Air, Maryland. "Social media can put added pressure on teenagers if used in an unhealthy way."

However, experts don't think teenagers need to unplug completely.

Leslie Parker, a life coach in Baltimore, Maryland, said there are some benefits to social media. One is staying connected to people. It all depends on how students use it, she said. Many teenagers use social media for good reasons.

Community concerns can be shared on social media, Hessler said. "People can share their life stories," she said.

Social Media Can Lead To Emotional Issues

Social media can be more of a risk than adults realize. That comes from a 2012 report by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Some teenagers may face online bullying. They also might develop depression. Depression is a serious illness. It is different from just feeling sad. Depression causes ongoing stress and interferes with a person's ability to function.

Social media also might create body image issues. A survey of young people was done by the Royal Society for Public Health in the United Kingdom. It found that young girls compared themselves to photos of "perfect girls." These photos may actually be edited.

Octavia Sykes works to help girls who have trouble with their body image. She said social media can increase these concerns.

Teens Say They Worry About Missing Out

Social media may separate teenagers from the real world. Hessler said meetings with her might be the only time some teens have a conversation without the interruption of social media or other technology. Some teenagers panic if they cannot check Twitter or Snapchat, she said. This can happen if their phones die or are taken away by their parents.

Kristina Dyson is a student at Mercy High School in Baltimore. She said she uses Snapchat and Twitter to communicate with her friends to know what they are doing.

"If I don't have social media, I don't know what's going on, and I need to know what's going on," she said.

Teens can fear missing out. This can be a problem if it creates anxiety or interferes with school work and everyday life, experts said.

Teens Losing Their Connection With People

Parker said social media can keep teenagers away from family time. They might have fewer real-life conversations.

"Kids should connect with people, not so much the machines, not so much Twitter," she said. She thinks later "it will just make them become more distant, in terms of talking to someone."

The American Academy of Pediatrics report found that parts of social media can be good. For example, students can connect to discuss homework.

They also can join groups of creative people, Sykes said.

Hessler suggested setting a schedule for social media use. When sleeping or studying, students should remove their device from the room.

Teenagers can also learn to be more aware of their social media use, Sykes said. If you find using social media is making you anxious, it may be time to pull back, and realize you aren't going to miss out on anything.