

Public Safety Advisory | Social Media & Youth Mental Health

Your Child's Phone is Not Neutral.



Social media platforms were engineered to be addictive - endless scroll, algorithm-driven feeds, and dopamine-triggering notifications deliberately targeting the developing brains of children and teens. Addiction in a young person is not a character flaw or a parenting failure. **It is an injury.** And those responsible can be held accountable.

US Surgeon General | 2024

Called for mandatory **warning labels on all social media platforms** - comparing their dangers to tobacco and alcohol - citing a national adolescent mental health emergency.



7h 22m

AVERAGE DAILY TEEN SCREEN TIME

Common Sense Media*



5 hrs

DAILY SOCIAL MEDIA HEAVIEST IS TEEN USERS

APA, 2024*



40%

OF HIGH SCHOOLERS: PERSISTENT SADNESS & HOPELESSNESS

CDC YRBS, 2023*



2x

GREATER SUICIDE RISK, THE HIGHEST AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Surgeon General Advisory*

The Problem

Designed to Trap Children

95% of teens use social media, 46% say they are online "almost constantly." These platforms use the same psychological triggers as slot machines: variable reward loops, social validation metrics, and algorithms calibrated to maximize engagement - regardless of harm.

34% of teen girls say social media makes them feel worse about their own lives. A review of 50 studies across 17 countries linked relentless exposure to curated, unattainable ideals directly to eating disorders and body dysmorphia.

Depression | Anxiety | Self-Harm | Eating Disorders | Body Dysmorphia
Suicidal Ideation | Sleep Disruption

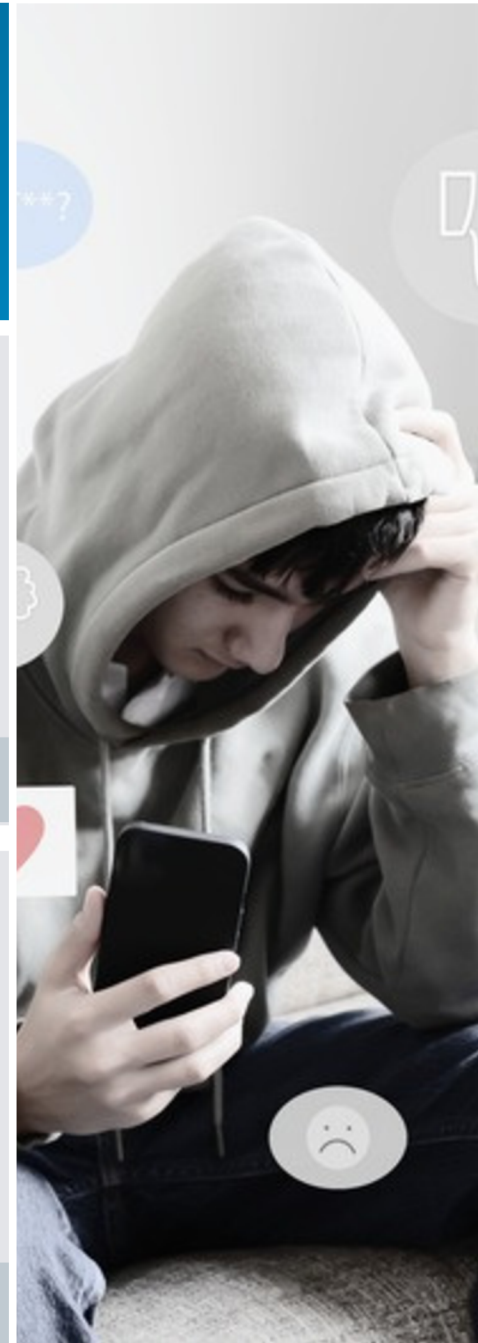
Addiction is an injury

The Developing Brain Cannot Consent to Being Hijacked

The adolescent brain - especially ages 10-19 - is in a critical developmental window. Social Media overuse overstimulates the brain's reward center, rewiring neural pathways to crave instant gratification. This is not a phase. It is documentable neurological harm.

Teens with the highest social media use are twice as likely to report poor mental health and self-harm. Over 2,500 federal lawsuits (MDL No. 3047, N.D. Cal.) allege that Meta, TikTok, Snap, and YouTube knowingly addicted children and failed to protect them.

42 Attorneys General have demanded Congressional Action.
A jury awarded \$375 million against Meta in 2025 for violating child safety laws.



What Parents Can Do Right Now?

01 DELAY SOCIAL MEDIA UNTIL 16

Children under 16 often lack the neurological maturity to resist the addictive and manipulative design of social media platforms. Pediatric experts and movements like “Wait Until 8th” increasingly support delaying smartphone and social media access as one of the most effective steps parents can take to protect children’s mental and emotional well-being.

02 NO PHONES IN BEDROOMS OVERNIGHT

Create a family charging station in a shared area of the home and keep devices out of bedrooms overnight. Late-night social media use often replaces the restorative sleep teens critically need for healthy brain development, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. In contrast, sleep deprivation can intensify anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns.

03 SET HARD DAILY LIMITS

Studies show that limiting social media use to about 30 minutes per day can help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression in teens. Parents can support healthier digital habits by using tools like Apple Screen Time or Android Digital Wellbeing to set reasonable daily limits and create clear, age-appropriate boundaries together as a family.

04 NO-PHONE ZONES AT MEALS & FAMILY TIME

Establish consistent, non-negotiable screen-free times throughout the day, especially during meals, homework, and before bedtime. Consistency matters more than perfection, and children are far more likely to follow healthy digital boundaries when parents model those same habits in their own daily lives.

05 EXPLAIN HOW THE ALGORITHM WORKS

Teens who understand how social media platforms are intentionally designed to maximize engagement are often better equipped to resist unhealthy digital habits. Talking openly about endless scrolling, algorithm-driven feeds, notifications, and other engagement traps can help young people recognize manipulation and build healthier relationships with technology.

06 KNOWING THE WARNING SIGNS

Irritability when devices are removed, lying about screen time, declining grades, social withdrawal, and noticeable changes in sleep, appetite, or body image should not be dismissed as typical teen moodiness. These behaviors can be warning signs of deeper mental health concerns and unhealthy patterns associated with excessive social media use.