



 **Social Media and Youth Mental Health: a Call to Being Informed** 

Presenters: Aurora E. Green (she/her) & Puneet Parmar (she/her)

Co-authors: Hannah Milius, Kathryn B. Guajardo, Jennifer B. Blossom
Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology (C-CAP) Lab

1

 **Who are we? C-CAP Lab** 

Aurora E. Green (she/her); Puneet Parmar

2

Wabanaki History



Mikmaq Nation
Learn more about the [Mikmaq Nation](#).



Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians
Learn more about the [Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians](#).



Passamaquoddy Tribe
Learn more about the [Passamaquoddy Tribes at Indian Township and Sipayik](#).



Penobscot Nation
Learn more about the [Penobscot Nation](#).

Image & more information available from: <https://wabanakialliance.com/wabanaki-history/>




3

Table of Contents

01 Current State of Affairs	02 When is Digital Media Helpful, When is it Hurtful?
03 Moving Forward	Throughout Audience check-ins

4

Learning Objectives

-  Identify how artificial intelligence (AI), social media, and digital media more broadly impact youth mental health.
-  Identify risk factors associated with unhelpful or unhealthy social media use among youth.
-  Develop skills to effectively communicate research-informed, accessible guidance to caregivers, youth, and community members, including how to identify reliable sources and promote healthy media habits.

5

Audience Check-In

Describe your role in interacting with youth? (e.g., LCSW, caregiver, licensed psychologist, student, etc.)

✦ Add your thoughts here:

- Mentimeter code: XXXX XXXX
- Or: [link]

How would you rate your overall level of comfort talking with youth about digital media?

✦ Respond here:

- Mentimeter code: XXXX XXXX
- Or: [link]


6

Audience Check-In 😊

[QR code here]

Word cloud: What comes to mind when you think about digital/social media & youth?



- ✦ Add your thoughts here:
 - Mentimeter code: XXXX XXXX
 - Or: [link]



7

01 Current State of Affairs

Background & what policies exist nationally and internationally?





8

Youth Mental Health

- ✦ In 2023, ~40% of high school students reported being persistently sad/hopeless
- ✦ Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth aged 10-24
- ✦ The COVID-19 pandemic led to increased:
 - Isolation
 - Screen time
 - Rise in social comparison
 - Fear of missing out
 - Exposure to negative media messaging


(CDC, 2021; Marciano et al., 2022; Rideout et al., 2022; Woolf, 2025)



9

Social Media & Youth

- ✦ Most youth have easy access to media, via cellphones:
 - 40% of 10-year-olds
 - 70% of 12-year-olds
 - 90% of 14-year-olds
- ✦ Youth social media use has been explored in many contexts including
 - Well-being
 - Mental health
 - Sleep
 - Social connectedness




(Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Alonzo et al., 2021; Charamanet al., 2024; Scott et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2021)

10

Digital Media, AI, & Algorithmic Targeting


- ✦ Digital media: digitized content that can be transmitted over the internet or computer networks
 - Includes TV shows, movies, podcast, and digitized text
- ✦ AI first appeared in 1956 when Alan Turing developing the “Turing Test”
- ✦ AI became more “mainstream” and widely available in 2022 with the release of ChatGPT
- ✦ Algorithmic targeting: data is collected and categorized in order to target consumers via advertising/to create a more relevant and customized social media algorithm




(Anoyha, 2017; Beauvisage et al., 2023; Roose, 2022; Sikarwar, 2016)

11

2023 APA Health Advisory




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence
MAY 2023




Several considerations outlined


1. Social media is not inherently **good** or **bad**;
2. Highly individual to each youth
3. Age-appropriate considerations
4. Algorithms can be biased




12

APA Health Advisory Recommendations 



- ✦ Social media use that promotes socialization can be helpful
 - Decrease negative impacts of social isolation
 - Build social connection and community
 - Especially for... similar identities or share similar experiences
- ✦ Social media usage should be developmentally tailored
 - "Like" buttons, recommendations, notifications
- ✦ Adult supervision for early adolescents
 - Coaching, discussions around social media use
 - Gradually increase autonomy with age



13

APA Health Advisory Recommendations 

- ✦ Limit or remove exposure to illegal or harmful content
 - Report such content
- ✦ Periodic check-ins with adolescents
- ✦ Limit use of social media:
 - Improve sleep and physical activity
 - Reduce social comparison
- ✦ Social media literacy training

14

Social Media Bans Internationally 


- ✦ Social media bans for youth are becoming more common:
 - E.g., Australia
- ✦ Bans pose challenges
 - Concurrent calls to retain social media access for youth
 - Responsible use of social media as an alternative to bans



15

Policies About AI

- ✦ AI is rapidly evolving & policymakers cannot keep up
- ✦ Limited guidance worldwide
 - Some countries are ahead of others (e.g., Canada & Finland developed AI policies in 2017)
 - Other countries are still in the consultation and development phase
- ✦ While national-level policymakers are keeping up, it's important to create informed policies at the institutional level



(Galindo et al., 2021)

16



When is Digital Media Helpful, When is it Hurtful?

02 What we know about digital media & youth mental health

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ 

17


Audience Check-In

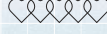
[QR code here]

Give an example of one (1) way you think digital/social media might *benefit* youth? ✦

✦ Add your thoughts here: ✦

- Mentimeter code: XXXX XXXX ✦
- Or: [link] ✦





18

Helpful: Increasing Connection 


“For marginalized youth living in rural communities in Maine, online communities can be a saving grace.


‘Their access to social media is how they build community and hope for the future if they’re in a physical setting that doesn’t have that support’”

– Dr. Blossom for the *Boothbay Register* (2025). *Drawing the line: AI’s effect on youth mental health, education*




19


Helpful: A Place for Creative Expression 




- ✦ Youth may find an ability to authentically express themselves online
 - Through this, and as youth enter into adolescence, they may start to discover different/new aspects of their identity




(Nagata et al., 2025)



20

Helpful: Identifying Supports 

- ✦ Certain searches can help youth and families identify resources and places to seek help
 - For example, searching anything related to suicide brings up the suicide crisis hotline (988)
- ✦ Youth may also find certain platforms that help break down the mental health stigma




21

Audience Check-In

[QR code here]

Give an example of one (1) way you think digital/social media might harm youth?

- ✦ Add your thoughts here:
 - Mentimeter code: XXXX XXXX
 - Or: [link]




22

Harmful: AI isn't Human

“An important piece that AI misses, is that there can be a problematic behavior that occurs because of a negative emotion. A therapist will validate the emotion, but not the behavior, because if the behavior is unhelpful or harmful, we don't want to reinforce that. AI cannot make that distinction,”



– Dr. Blossom for the *Boothbay Register* (2025). *Drawing the line: AI's effect on youth mental health, education*



23


Harmful: Unhealthy Comparisons

- ✦ Social media allows easy, quick access to unrealistic comparisons
 - Many things displayed to youth online depict things that **do not** reflect reality
 - This can be particularly confusing for the developing brain





(Khalaf et al., 2023)



24

Harmful: Dangers of Misinformation 

- ✦ **Anything** can be posted on the Internet, and it does not always reflect reality
- ✦ Misinformation can quickly be spread, leading to undue panic, worry, and stress
 - Misinformation can lead to youth or their families psychopathologizing normal behaviors or vice versa
- ✦ What about social media's role in self-diagnosis?




25

03

Moving Forward

Ways to implement and promote healthy social media use in youth.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ 

26

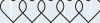
Promoting Healthy Social Media Behaviors 

Be aware of the risks and benefits of social media usage

- ✦ Explain them to your child in an age appropriate way

Establish age-appropriate media monitoring and controls

- ✦ Decide together who they can friend, follow, and message and who/what must be blocked, keywords to ban, and what types of media that they can share


(Borgen & Domoff, 2023) 


27

Promoting Healthy Social Media Behaviors

Discuss as a family:

- ◆ Procedures for managing screen time
- ◆ Social-media-free zones and places
- ◆ Automatic “ask an adult” topics
- ◆ Things that social media *should* and *should not* be used for



(Borgen & Domoff, 2023) 

28

First Approach Skills Training (FAST) Programs

FAST Programs

For each FAST program, there is a free e-book “Smarter” educational handbook that can be given out as a first step in care, prior to referral for the program-guided intervention. Click a focus area below to access the program materials at www.mentalhealth.gov.




(Blossom et al., 2024)

29

Promoting Healthy Digital Media Behaviors


First Approach Skills Training-Parenting (FAST-Parenting):

- ◆ Developmentally tailored
- ◆ Creation of a Family Screen Plan
- ◆ Cell Phone Contract



First Approach Skills Training
Parenting Teenagers (FAST-P)

Caregiver Workbook
By Elin Schoenfelder Gonzalez, Ph.D., and Brent Staley, Ph.D.
© 2024 Mental Health Services


(Schoenfelder Gonzalez et al., 2026) 

30

AI and Generative Content

Be aware of the risks and benefits of AI and generative content

- ✦ Discuss appropriate usage and consumption of this content together
- ✦ Review what information should and should not be shared with AI prompts or messages
- ✦ Model and practice together identifying other ways to gather and distill information





(Chowdhury et al., 2026; Wei et al., 2024)

34

Become Internet Detectives

Be aware of the risks and benefits of AI and generative content:

- ✦ Review propaganda together
- ✦ Establish go-to sources to get accurate information
- ✦ Evaluate who is presenting the information
 - Discuss why the information is on your screen and motives
- ✦ Discuss the role of algorithms, pop-ups, and “rumor mills”
- ✦ Discuss the impact of fake or edited pictures and videos on body image and self-esteem
 - Review motivations of sharing with others


(Chowdhury et al., 2026; Wei et al., 2024)

35

Promoting Healthy Social Media Behaviors


Talk about social media with youth:

- ✦ Have youth communicate about what they are seeing (and where they’re seeing it)
- ✦ Discuss the importance of setting their accounts to “private”
- ✦ Help youth understand the role of followers vs. friends
- ✦ Influencers





(Borgen & Domoff, 2023; Chan, 2023; Wei et al., 2024)

36

Promoting Healthy Social Media Behaviors 


Model:

- ✦ A healthy relationship with social media
- ✦ Strategies for finding appropriate online communities
- ✦ Questioning sources and recognizing AI-generated content
- ✦ Appropriate problem-solving for concerning, unwelcome, or harmful online content
- ✦ Taking breaks from social media, especially during high-stress or high-impact events


(Borgen & Domoff, 2023; Chan, 2023; Wei et al., 2024)

37

Guidelines for Adolescents Consuming Media 


Limit social media during “contact points”:

- ✦ The timing and social context of adolescent media use are important predictors of wellbeing.
 - Media use that interferes with sleep or removes opportunity for high contact points is associated with poorer mental health, including elevated anxiety and depressive symptoms.




(Akat & Hamarta, 2025; Borgen & Domoff, 2023)

38

Guidelines for Mindful Consumption 

Be mindful about how adolescents are consuming social media:

- ✦ Benefits of following only friends (e.g., better body image)
- ✦ Risks of following influencers (e.g., risk-taking behaviors)
- ✦ Discuss the impacts of “doom scrolling” and anxious avoidance with youth to encourage self-reflection and healthier patterns of engagement



(Akat & Hamarta, 2025; Borgen & Domoff, 2023)

39


Guidelines for Mindful Consumption

Don't treat social media engagement as an "all or nothing":

- ✦ Talk about steps that you'll take for managing problematic social media usage and engagement before they create accounts.

Show youth how to unfollow, report, and block unkind/harmful accounts:

- ✦ Youth who experience cyberbullying & cybervictimization report fear of losing social media usage when they share concerning messages and content with their families.



(Borgen & Domoff, 2023)


40

Audience Check-In- Last One!

[QR code here]


How would you rate your overall level of comfort talking with youth about digital media?


- ✦ Add your thoughts here:
 - Mentimeter code: XXXX XXXX
 - Or: [link]




41

THANK YOU!


DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS? 



Looking for youth mental health treatment?
Learn more about UMaine's Psychological Services Center



Learn more about our work and research in the C-CAP Lab!



CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, and includes icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

42
