

TEENS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE: WHY SHOULD PARENTS CARE?

A staggering 95% of teens report owning a smartphone, and many adolescents use their cellphones to access social networking platforms like Instagram and Snapchat (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Up to 20% of youth in Ontario report using social media for more than five hours a day (Boak et al., 2018). Regardless of percentages, the numbers make one thing clear—connecting with others online is an integral part of teenage life. While parents today may be aware of how social media works, their understanding of their child's online social environment may be limited.

What opportunities and challenges does social media present for teens? How can parents best navigate their child's online friendships?

POSITIVES

Social media platforms allow teens to

regardless of time of day or physical location, encouraging them to stay in touch with their friends, and improving friendship quality (Antheunis et al., 2014; Davis, 2012)

on posts from others, which can boost self-esteem and perceived social support (Best et al., 2014; Valkenburg et al., 2006)

Talk to their peers

Receive positive feedback

from diverse backgrounds based on common interests (O'Keefe & Clark-Pearson, 2011)

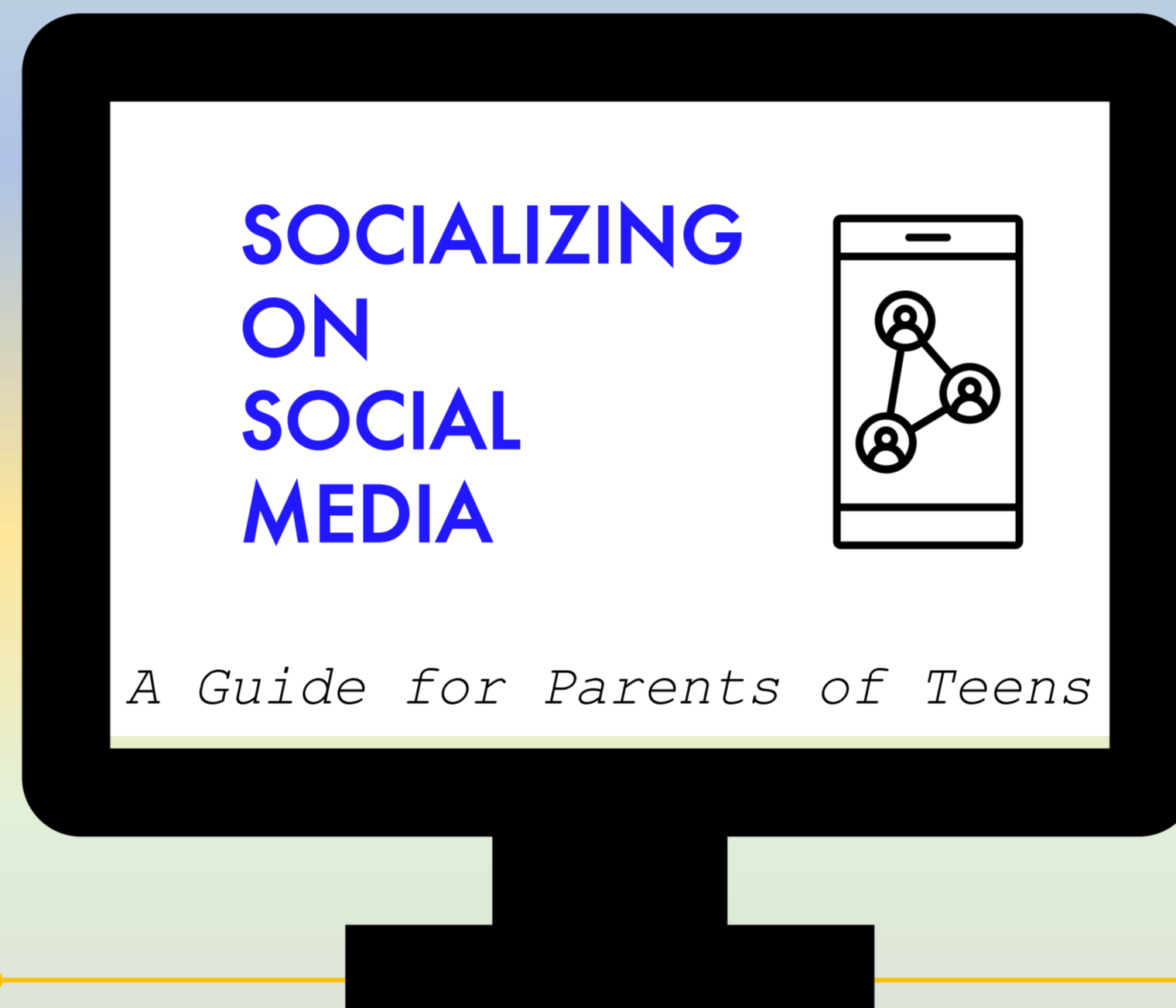
Make friends with others

Engage with advocacy efforts

especially helpful in connecting marginalized youth with other teens who share their lived experiences and values (Ciszek, 2017)

MISCONCEPTION: Being online means teens lose their traditional in-person friendships.

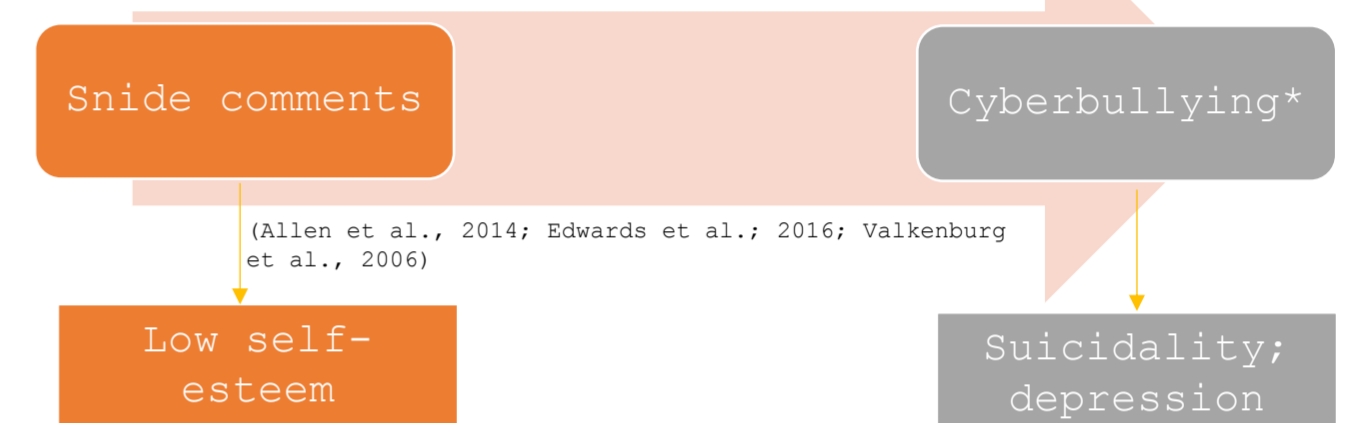
FACT: Being online does not mean teens are disengaging from their offline friendships. However, youth do tend to interact with close friends at higher rates online than in person, indicating a shift in how modern teens maintain friendships (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).



NEGATIVES

While engaging with others on social media, teens may:

- Encounter a greater frequency of negative commentary by peers, ranging from:



**Youth of colour experience cyberbullying at lower rates than white adolescents; however they experience suicidal ideation at the same rates as white teens when cyber-bullied.

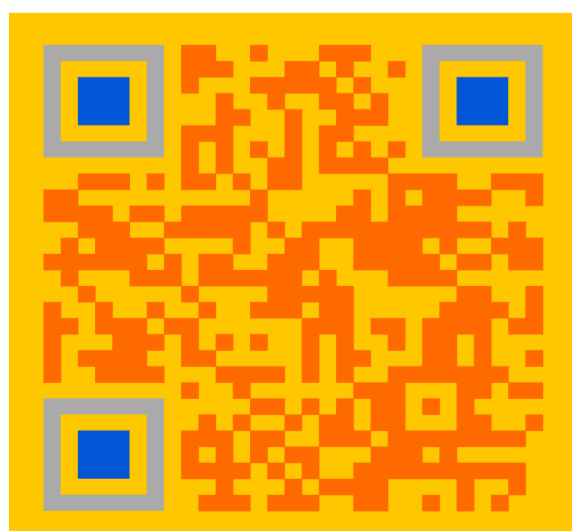
- The open format of social networking leaves teens vulnerable to harmful comments from known peers and strangers (Allen et al., 2014).
- Teens may compare themselves to others and feel like they are not at the same place in life as their peers - this may trigger fear of missing out (FOMO) (Oberst et al., 2016).
- FOMO is linked to depression and anxiety symptoms; social comparisons on social media are related to lower well-being.
- Adolescents may feel like they are obligated to be consistently available to peers online, making social media a chore (Winstone et al., 2021).

MISCONCEPTION: Teen experiences on social media are overwhelmingly negative.

FACT: Most teens report finding social media use to be neither an overtly positive or negative experience (44%), and more teens find social media engagement enjoyable (46%) than harmful (10%) (Beyens et al., 2020)



HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR TEEN'S ONLINE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT



ATTENTION PARENTS!
Scan the QR code for more resources!

Establishing open lines of communication with teens can allow parents to know what platforms their adolescents are likely to visit. They can then expand their own digital literacy about these sites, understanding the nature of these platforms and how social interactions on these sites are likely to function (MediaSmarts, 2015).

Parents may also benefit from having a discussion with their children about what their teens like and don't like about social media; asking questions about why their child wants to use an online platform, who they want to connect to on this platform, and so on.

Parents can make their children aware of the pitfalls of social media use (e.g., receiving hurtful comments, being unable to permanently remove shared posts) while also affirming that social media posts can go away, and they are there to support the teen in this circumstance.

Parents may also be interested in implementing a family media plan (Chassiakos et al., 2016). Family media plans allow for parents to implement consistent rules around digital media use. Since they pertain to the entire family unit, adolescents may also be more amenable to abiding by the plan, since they are not being uniquely targeted by their parents.