

Social Media & Teens' Well-Being


The Pros and Cons: A Guide for Parents

Social media and technology have irrevocably changed the way that teens interact with their social networks. With 95% of teens reporting owning a cellphone, teens are connected around the clock (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). But what impact does social media use have on teens' well-being and mental health?

Benefits of Social Media



Social technologies offer many potential positive benefits for users' well-being:

- **Social Support.** Positive peer relationships are essential for teens' well-being and social media makes it easier for teens to connect with friends around the world
- **Enhanced Friendship Quality.** Time spent online with friends can lead to enhanced relationship quality, which is an important resilience factor for teens' well-being ¹
- **Self-Esteem.** Teens who received positive  feedback on social media reported increases in self-esteem ²
- **Social Belonging.** By connecting with others online, teens feel a sense of social belongingness and acceptance which is related to numerous benefits for teens functioning ³
- **Self-Disclosure.** Discussing sensitive topics such as emotions or secrets is important for friendships and emotional well-being and might be easier for some teens through a screen ^{3,4}
- **Self-Expression.** The internet offers teens opportunities to experiment with identity development and self-expression with friends in a way that is more controllable than face-to-face ⁵

“It has given kids my age an outlet to express their opinions and emotions, and connect with people who feel the same (age 15)”

“It gives people a bigger audience to speak hate and belittle each other (age 15)”

(Anderson & Jiang, 2018)



Risks of Social Media



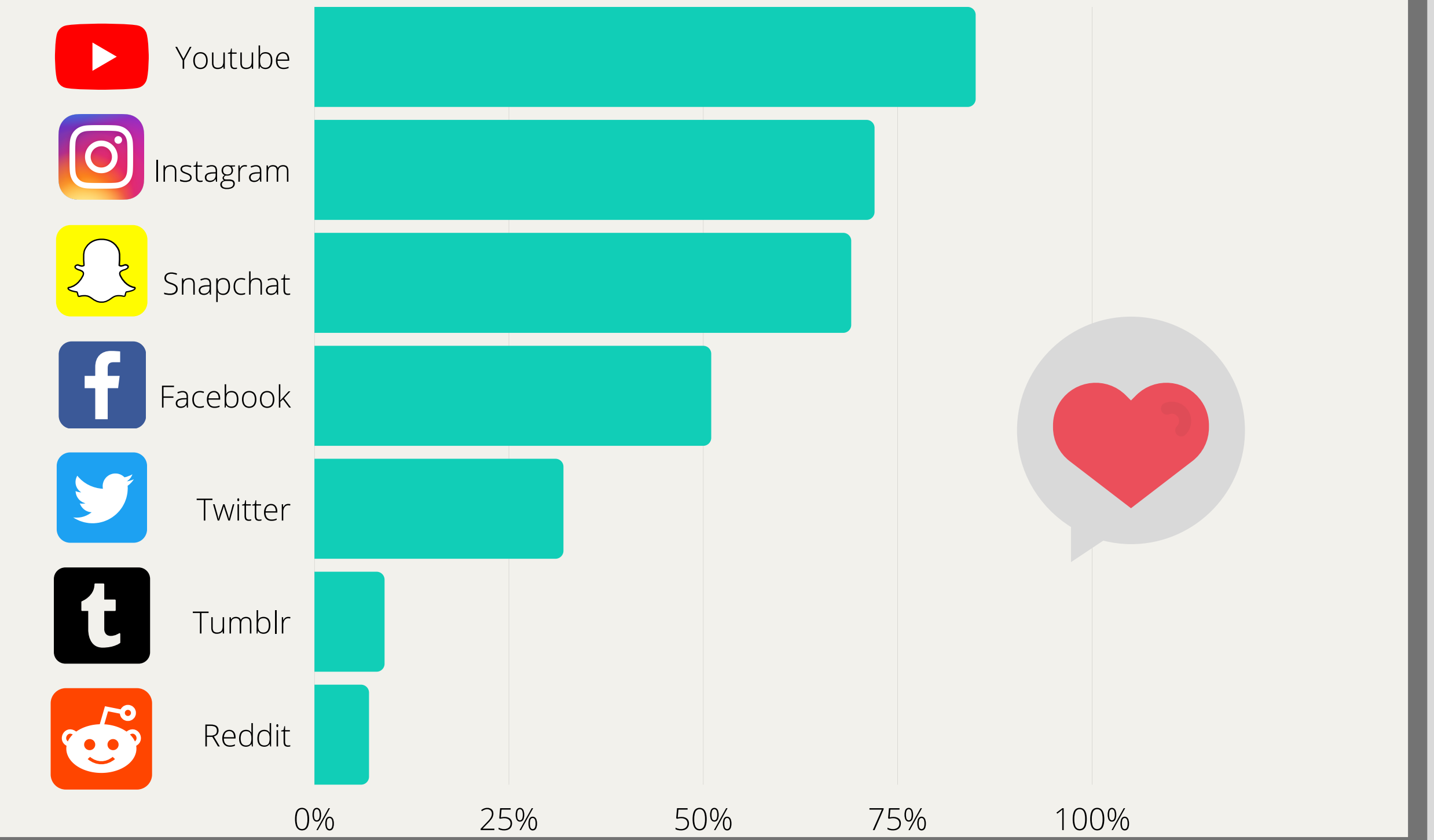
Social technologies also pose many potential risks for users' well-being:

- **Cyberbullying.** Cyberbullying can have devastating and lasting consequences for teens' mental health, social functioning, and academic achievement ⁶
- **Self-Esteem.** Teens who received negative feedback on social media reported decreases in self-esteem ²
- **Miscommunication.** Conflict with friends can be ⁷ unintentionally created due to miscommunication through text, especially when using humour or sarcasm
- **Body Image and Social Comparison.** Social media use and social comparison have been linked to dissatisfaction with body image, especially for girls. Teens may also feel inadequate if constantly comparing themselves to others ⁸
- **Mental Health and Compulsive Internet Use.** Heavy social media use and cyberbullying are linked to increased risk for social anxiety, depression, suicide, and self-harm. Teens may also become "addicted" to social media and engage in risky-behaviours online ^{10,11}
- **Sleep Disturbances.** Increased social media use at night is associated with poor sleep quality among teens, which has a negative impact on teens' overall well-being ¹²
- **Permanency of Online Content.** Teens often regret content posted online, yet once social media content is posted a digital footprint remains. ¹³

1. Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; 2. Valkenburg et al., 2006; 3. Davis, 2012; 4. Valkenburg & Peter, 2009; 5. Best et al., 2014; 6. Bottino et al., 2015; 7. Steer et al., 2020; 8. Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; 9. Dhir et al., 2018; 10. Gámez-Guadix et al., 2016; 11. Barry et al., 2017; 12. Woods & Scott, 2016; 13. Wang et al., 2011; 14. Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017; 15. Derks et al., 2008; 16. Bowman-Smith, 2020

By: Celina Bowman-Smith

What apps do teens use?



(Anderson & Jiang, 2018)

Talking to Teens About Social Media

ADD FRIEND

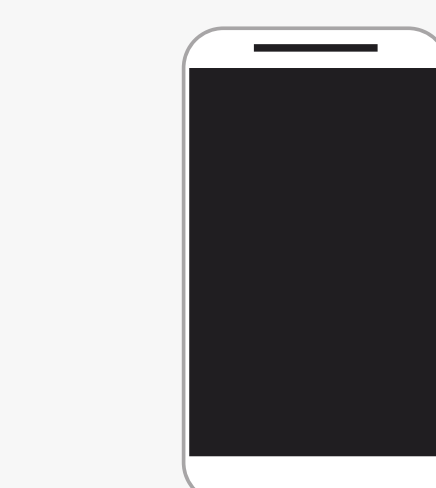
Don't "Friend" Strangers

Teens who interact with friends online are most likely to experience benefits, while teens who interact with strangers are most at risk for the dangers of social media ¹

The Goldilocks Hypothesis

Research suggests that social media is not *good* or *bad* when used in moderation. A "just right" amount of screen time during each weekday was associated with maximized benefits:

Recommended "Just Right" Daily Screen Time ¹⁴



1 h 57 min



1 h 40 mins

SHARE

Avoid Risky Online Behaviour

Discuss the dangers of social media with teens and encourage teens to avoid sharing any content that may be personal, damaging, or embarrassing, even when sharing with friends they trust. Remind teens about the permanency of online content and how they may regret content posted when overly emotional or worked-up

What Do You Meme?

Discuss that sometimes the best intentions can be misinterpreted online due to a lack of social cues. Encourage teens to be as unambiguous as possible on social media. Using emojis can help clarify meaning online ¹⁵



Bedtime Social Media Use

Due to poor sleep quality associated with social media use at bedtime, access to technology at night should be restricted (e.g., removing cellphones and laptops from teens' bedrooms at night).

