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October 03, 2022

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FIQWS 10108

Social Media and Teenagers’ Health

Social media has been popular for a reason, the number one thing that teenagers use and check. According to the Nashville Film Institute, social media is described as what people use to share status updates or posts on websites or applications. There are many social media applications in the modern world, including: Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, and recently, TikTok. Social media has two sides online, some positives and negatives. Some positive points include finding communities relating to your hobbies or specific interests, smaller businesses having more traffic through likes and website/location visits, as well as a person paving their own ways to freely express themselves (Clark). Some of the downsides of social media is the online bullying factor, internet addiction, as well as mental health being at stake (Clark). With more media applications being downloaded, used, and consumed, the physical and mental health of teenagers will be on the rise. Social media is growing rapidly, however, teenagers develop issues such as loneliness, PTSD, suicide, or cyberbullying, with excessive use.

Mental health issues are on the rise, especially for teenagers. Mental health affects how all people act, think, or feel which includes psychological factors, well-being physically and online, as well as emotional factors. There are many types of mental health issues, including depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia, just to name a few. According to the Better Health Channel of Australia, depression is a mood disorder characterized by loss of interest and reduced energy. PTSD is a mental health condition that develops for any people who have experienced any traumatic event. These issues have been defined because most people tend to confuse the terms and do not know how to cope or what to do. Cyberbullying is another mental health issue with one out of six teenagers experiencing one of the following six forms of abusive behavior online: name calling, getting explicit images, false rumors being spread, physical threats, having activities tracked, or having explicit images shared online without consent. Leading on from this, cyberbullying eventually leads to suicide.

Suicide is a big problem in the United States, taking a toll of 1,642 people in the state of New York. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), there are 4.9 million visits to the ER on mental or behavioral disorders. There are also 55.7 million visits to physician offices with mental disorders as patients’ reasons. There is a shocking number of suicide deaths with 45,979 people tolling. Teenagers are influenced online by what other users are doing. On TikTok, there is a very disturbing trend that shows people trying to hang themselves, with some pushing the narrative too far, resulting to their deaths. There is an important hotline, the National Hotline for Mental Health Crises and Suicide Prevention, if any person is experiencing suicidal thoughts or attempt, by dialing 988.

Physical health is another issue to talk about in terms of social media. Everyone, including teenagers, devote their attention to Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok (Bellan). According to University of Nevada, Reno, in 2018, people aged sixteen to twenty-four years of age spend at least three hours using social media daily. With daily social media use, physical health issues arise. There is a whole slew of physical health issues while using social media. Some of these issues include eyestrain as well as poor neck and back posture. There are some factors that eventually lead to eyestrain. Increased time spent looking at a screen, you can develop eyestrain easily. Having screens too bright can also cause eyestrain. Also, viewing content too close or even too far away can cause your eyes to strain. Having dry eye or allergies can result in straining of the eyes.

Using social media can also distract a teenager or anyone for that matter, taking their attention away from their schoolwork or job, for example. Another issue is that teenagers are more likely to have poor sleep quality, resulting in sleeping problems. Some reasons as to why media could interfere with sleep include simulation, anxiety, or the fear of missing out. A third issue with physical health is that social media users just sit on their couches at home not wanting to go outside and spend time outside with friends or family and this results in health problems later in their lives. David Lee, an assistant professor at the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Buffalo, found that more social media users have more body symptoms as well as more doctors’ visits. Users also showed higher levels of chronic inflammation (in text citation).

An important activity to reduce physical health issues on social media use can be going outside with friends or doing sports such as football, baseball, basketball, jogging, and running. Another is to have teens surround themselves with positive friends and people who have an active lifestyle. Cyberbullying is a major problem that is plaguing teens online. This has also led teenagers to harm themselves or killing themselves. In 2019, a survey found that sixteen percent of students in grades nine through twelve were bullied online. Regarding the TikTok application, there are many more trends or challenges that have resulted in physical injuries. Some examples include the Milk Crate challenge or the Slap a teacher challenge. In the Milk Crate challenge, people would stack milk crates and try to climb to the top. With the Slap a teacher challenge, students were encouraged to slap teachers in their schools and during that, being filmed by other students. An eighteen-year-old student was charged with assault because of this challenge. With this, teenagers are easily influenced by the things or trends they see online.

Social media use has its positive factors as well. One factor is that social media draws all people (teenagers included), allowing everyone to connect and communicate with one another. Since teenagers are on their phones more often, they can also learn educationally, by watching YouTube videos for example. Teens are also watching content to entertain themselves as well as publish posts and videos so other users can like or comment on the video/post. Common Sense Media, a nonprofit tracking young people’s technology habits, found that teens spend an average of seven hours and twenty-two minutes, back in 2015 (Siegel). Another positive factor is online security where teenagers are setting their online accounts to private. Teens can also adopt or develop social skills online as well as communication skills through the means of texting or video calling.

Reducing social media consumption is a tricky thing for a teenager to conduct. However, at the end, it is going to help with smartphone or social media addiction. One way to reduce use is to limit screen viewing time. Having a parent monitor what their teen is doing online as well as checking their screen time periodically will be beneficially for teens. Another way is for the teen to adjust their phone brightness settings. This can reduce media consumption as well as reduce eyestrain. Also, taking advantage of the blue light filter option in your phone or getting blue light filtered lenses could also help with reducing media use. A last choice to reduce media consumption is taking advantage of the 20/20/20 rule. That is, every twenty seconds, take a twenty-minute break, while looking at something twenty feet away.

Teenagers can always limit their social media use and put down their phones. Viewing online content every single day can be detrimental for teens. When teenagers are viewing negative posts/videos or not real content, it leads to a bad image. Taking away or cutting the negative content can make their lives happier. The physical health effects of use are back and neck strain, eyestrain, as well as poor sleep quality. Mental health effects include PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicide. Teenagers might make changes to themselves to become more popular or famous online, which can lead to lower self-esteem. More health issues, mentally and physically, will be higher in teenagers, as more social media apps are downloaded and used.

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