

# SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND MENTAL HEALTH OF ARKANSAS YOUTH

## Understanding the Risks and Minimizing Harm to Children

The connection between social media, mental health, and adolescent development is complex. Arkansas parents and caregivers need to understand children's social media use and minimize possible harm.

### Monitor Time on Social Media

Researchers find that 12-to-15-year-olds who spend more than three hours a day on social media are at double the risk for depression, anxiety and other poor mental health outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

- 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders average 3.5 hours on social media. One in seven spend 7+ hours on social media each day.<sup>1</sup>
- Studies have linked excessive social media use by adolescents to a decrease in life satisfaction and the creation of neural pathways comparable to addiction.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Parents and caregivers should utilize screen-time monitoring tools built into most devices to understand how much time children spend online. Most parental controls also allow time limits to be set by device or app.

### Ensure Social Media Use Does Not Disrupt Sleep

The relationships between poor sleep quality, insufficient sleep quantity, depression, and social media have all been identified by researchers.<sup>7</sup> Poor sleep has also been linked to altered neurological development in

#### DATA POINTS

## 3.5 HRS

Average time 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders on social media spend on platforms each day.<sup>1</sup>



## 40%

Children ages 8-12 using social media.<sup>6</sup>

## 30 MIN

Limiting social media use to a half-hour a day over three weeks led to a notable reduction in depression severity in one study.<sup>8</sup>



adolescent brains as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviors.<sup>9,10,11</sup> To help ensure children get enough sleep, parents and caregivers can:

- Work with children to agree on screen-free nights starting at least one hour before bedtime.
- Utilize parental controls to have devices automatically lock at a set time each evening.

## Protect Children From Inappropriate Content

Almost two-thirds of children say they are “often” or “sometimes” exposed to hate-based content on social media.<sup>12</sup> Nearly 6 in 10 adolescent girls say they’ve been contacted by a stranger on social media who made them feel uncomfortable.<sup>13</sup> Parents and caregivers should work with children to adopt healthy social media practices like:

- Blocking or reporting unwanted or inappropriate content.
- Reaching out when they see or experience harassment.
- Understanding the implication of cyberbullying.
- Not sharing personal information online.

## Additional Resources for Parents and Caregivers

The time to foster healthy social media habits is now, while their childhoods are happening and their brains are still developing. Some additional resources to support families include:

- American Psychological Association Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence: [APA.org](https://www.apa.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health: [AAP.org/socialmedia](https://www.aap.org/socialmedia)
- Arkansas Department of Education Division of Elementary & Secondary Education Social Media Awareness Campaign: [DESE.ADE.Arkansas.gov/Offices/research-and-technology/smactalk](https://DESE.ADE.Arkansas.gov/Offices/research-and-technology/smactalk)
- Create a family media plan: [healthychildren.org/mediauseplan](https://healthychildren.org/mediauseplan)

Visit [ACHI.net/library/socialmediasafety](https://ACHI.net/library/socialmediasafety) for references.

### DATA POINTS



**1 IN 3**

Children who report using screen media until midnight or later on a typical weekday.<sup>12</sup>

**47%**

Arkansas high school seniors reporting depressive symptoms or feelings of prolonged sadness during the 2019-2020 school year.<sup>14</sup>



**64%**

Adolescents “often” or “sometimes” exposed to hate-based content through social media.<sup>12</sup>