

Social Media: The Benefits & Harms

Social media has become a part of daily life for both adults and children. Unlike other generations, today's kids are growing up with it, often beginning with watching YouTube videos at a very young age. While there are some positives to social media, like the ability to connect with friends, research shows it can be harmful to mental health, especially for children and teens whose brains are very sensitive to social feedback. Many factors contribute to the impact of social media, including the time spent on it, the type of content being viewed and interacted with, and the degree to which it interferes with daily life.



Potential Benefits:

- Connection with family and friends, especially if separated by distance
- Access to educational content
- Engagement in online communities that are related to interests and hobbies
- Ability to showcase creativity by sharing artwork, writing and other talents

Potential Harms:

- Excessive use can interfere with schoolwork, extracurricular activities, physical activity and hobbies and prevent children from getting adequate sleep, which is essential for growth and development
- The illusion of perfection contributes to lower self-esteem and poor body image
- Fear of missing out (FOMO) and envy - feeling like everyone else is living a more exciting, enjoyable life
- Cyberbullying and harassment
- Exposure to misinformation

Mission

The Fairfield CARES Community Coalition focuses on preventing substance misuse, fostering social and emotional wellness and resilience among youth, young adults, and families. The Coalition builds capacity, mobilizes the Fairfield community, and develops comprehensive strategies to help families make healthy choices that allow youth and young adults to thrive.

Get Involved!

The Fairfield CARES Community Coalition welcomes your involvement. Our coalition meetings are open to anyone who wants to be involved with the prevention of youth substance use and the promotion of mental health wellness. **The coalition meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month from 8:30 -10:00 AM.** Please contact Fairfield CARES to receive meeting information.

There are many opportunities to volunteer, even on a time limited basis, such as staffing our resource table at a community or school event, or join a task force to help strategize on a specific issue. Email us at the address below. **Don't forget to follow us on social media and share our posts with your network!**

Follow Us



Contact Us

Email: fairfieldcares@fairfieldct.org



www.FairfieldCaresCT.org



Social Media & Phones
A Guide for Parents



You Can Help Your Child Develop Healthy Relationships with Phones & Social Media!

- **Have an open discussion** about phone and social media use with your child; set expectations and ground rules, and the importance of having a healthy balance of screen time and other activities. **CommonsenseMedia.org** is a website that provides helpful guidance to parents.
- **Create device-free zones and device-free times** in your home. Keep phones, tablets and computers out of your child's bedroom so they get a good night's sleep. Sleep is crucial for brain development! Devices should not be at the table during mealtimes. Have a conversation with your family instead.
- **Model responsible behavior.** Children will do what they see; so they are much more likely to accept family media rules if you are following them too.
- **Teach basic media literacy** by teaching kids to be critical thinkers. Just because they read it online doesn't mean it's true. Teach them how to examine the source to understand if the information is accurate and reputable.
- **Make kids aware of advertising tactics**, like sponsored content, which allows companies to develop content that blends in with news and articles found online.
- **Educate kids to NEVER share any personal information** such as their name, address, age, gender, or photos with strangers or people they don't know well. Remember, people aren't always who they say they are when communicating online.
- **Encourage healthy skepticism.** When they're younger, encourage them to come to you if they see something questionable. If your child is a tween or teen, teach them how to use fact checking websites, like Snopes or FactCheck.org before sharing information.



“Adolescent social media use is predictive of a subsequent decrease in life satisfaction for girls 11–13 years old and boys 14–15 years old.”

Source: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media, 2023

Children (Ages 6-10)

- Limit your child's device use outside of school. Encourage device-free active and creative play with friends.
- If your child asks about a phone, consider the guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics and **CommonsenseMedia.org**.
- If your child needs a phone, check out resources on **WaitUntil8th.org** devices for non-Smart phone alternatives that don't provide access to social media or the internet.
- Have device-free zones, such as bedrooms, and device-free times such as meals, and an hour before bed; set ground rules for use.

Tween/Young Teens (Ages 11-13)

- Develop a family plan for media use. **ScreenSanity.org** has great resources.
- Supervise online activities and know what platforms your kids use and who they interact with.
- Set time limits to create a healthy balance between online and real life activities, and have device-free zones.
- Use parental controls such as Aura, mSpy, FamilyKeeper or others to limit the chances of encountering problematic content.
- Teach and reinforce basic internet safety - emphasize privacy, never to share personal information, such as name, address, age or photos, and no "talking" to strangers on social media or gaming platforms
- Adjust privacy settings to allow kids to only communicate with people you approve of and who are friends in real life.
- Device usage should stop an hour before bedtime, so the brain has time to adjust for rest.

Teenagers (Ages 14-18)

- Continue to supervise online activities and know what social media platforms your kids are using
- Have a "no device at bedtime" policy. Device usage should stop an hour before bedtime, so the brain has time to adjust for rest. Teens should leave their phones, tablets, laptops in another room to recharge overnight, so they get a good night's sleep.
- Emphasize how important it is to think before they post - whatever is posted online has the potential to live forever even if it's taken down.
- Show your kids how to manage privacy settings to control who can view their posts and personal information.
- Educate kids about cyberbullying and what to do if they encounter it
- Teach media literacy by encouraging them to fact-check before sharing information and be skeptical if things seem strange or too good to be true.



Why is Social Media So Addictive?

Social media use increases dopamine in the brain, which is associated with pleasure. The brain views it as a reward, which encourages the user to repeat the behavior. The good feelings associated with social media use are temporary, so the brain encourages you to seek out that reward again, driving you back to social media.

Warning Signs of Unhealthy Relationships with Social Media:

- It interferes with schoolwork or other responsibilities - instead of studying they're scrolling
- Decreased interest in other activities that they used to like
- Constantly checking social media for updates
- Using social media while doing other activities or when socializing with friends and family
- Feeling irritable when unable to check social media feeds

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, visit our website, fairfieldct.org/CARES-Resources for resources.

**If your child is in crisis, call/text 988.
If they are in immediate danger, call 911.**

One study found teens who spent more than 3 hours per day on social media had double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Source: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media, 2023