

Social Media and Mental Health

Tips for families of older kids and teens

[Leer en español](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/tips-para-familias/redes-sociales-y-salud-mental). (www.commonsensemedia.org/tips-para-familias/redes-sociales-y-salud-mental)

Nearly four in 10 teens and young adults (38%) reported symptoms of moderate to severe depression in 2020, up from 25% in 2018. We often assume social media contributes to the issue, but the truth is more complicated. Teens can use social media and the internet to find mental health information, advice, or support. But teens with mental health challenges also can be at risk for unhealthy behavior online.

For the many families dealing with mental health issues, know that there is help out there. Use [this list of family services](http://wideopenschool.org/families-and-teachers/family-services/#all/) (wideopenschool.org/families-and-teachers/family-services/#all/) to find resources for a range of needs. Also, use the tips below to help your kid balance the risks and rewards of social media.



Talk to your kids about the places they feel supported online.

Kids who feel safe, supported, accepted, and understood are better able to make it through difficult times. Ask what they like about particular platforms and sites. What is it about the community that gives them a sense of belonging? Ask who they follow on social media and what they like about them. Show interest in their online lives and try not to judge.

Ask if they ever see things online that make them feel unsafe.

Do they ever see racist comments, hate speech, or bullying? How do they respond? Walk them through steps they can take. They can ignore the person, take screenshots for evidence, block the person on the platform, and report it to an adult. Tell them they can always come to you when something upsets them.

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Think twice before taking away the phone.

Before you shut off the phone or tablet as a consequence for their behavior, think about whether they're using the device to cope with mental health problems. The online world -- despite its faults -- can help kids stay connected to friends, find a supportive community, and get trustworthy health information. If you still need to take away the device, make sure they have access to alternative resources.

Pay close attention to social media if your kid is already struggling offline.

Watch for warning signs of mental health problems. These might include drug/alcohol abuse, loss of energy, frequent sadness, or avoiding contact with others. Create a [family media agreement](http://www.commonsense.org/education/sites/default/files/tlr-asset/document-common-sense-family-media-agreement.pdf) (www.commonsense.org/education/sites/default/files/tlr-asset/document-common-sense-family-media-agreement.pdf). This can help you set expectations for what they do online and how much access you have to their social media accounts, and guide their decisions when you aren't around. [Parental controls](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-parental-controls) (www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-parental-controls) can help you manage what they do when you're not there.

If you need help now

[National Suicide Hotline](https://www.suicideline.org/): (800) 273-TALK (8255) | [suicideline.org](https://www.suicideline.org/)

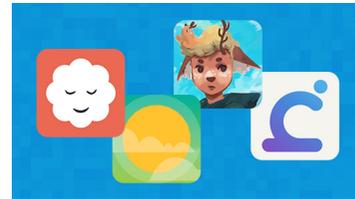
[Crisis Text Line](https://www.crisistextline.org/): 741741 | [crisistextline.org](https://www.crisistextline.org/)

More resources



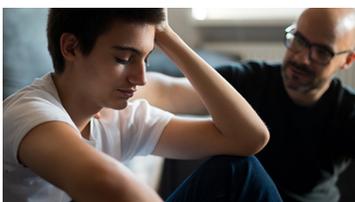
Family and Community Services

[wideopenschool.org/families-and-teachers/family-services/#all/](https://www.wideopenschool.org/families-and-teachers/family-services/#all/)



Apps to Help with Mental Health

[commonsensemedia.org/lists/apps-to-help-with-mental-health](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/apps-to-help-with-mental-health)



Mental Health Advice

[commonsensemedia.org/mental-health](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/mental-health)



Coping with COVID-19 Report

[commonsensemedia.org/research/coping-with-covid19-how-young-people-use-digital-media-to-manage-their-mental-health](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/coping-with-covid19-how-young-people-use-digital-media-to-manage-their-mental-health)