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## **Navigating Social Media: Tips for Teen Mental Health**

As the school year begins, social media continues to play a significant role in the lives of many tweens and teens. According to recent studies, more than one-third of 13-17-year-olds use social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook “almost constantly”. Even younger children, ages 8-12, report significant social media use. Many tweens and teens spend more time with media than with any other activity besides sleep. With the rise in child and teen depression and anxiety, understanding how social media affects mental health is crucial.

It's important to keep in mind that social media offers several mental health benefits for teens, including social connections and learning opportunities. Teens use social media to stay in touch with friends and family, join groups that reflect their interests, and find supportive communities. Additionally, social media allows them to follow educational content, engage with art, explore new hobbies, and share their creative works.

However, there are also risks associated with social media use. Excessive use can take away from important activities like face-to-face interactions, sleep, and academics. In addition, teens may encounter unhealthy content, including violent, dangerous, or misleading information, as well as idealized images that can negatively impact body image and self-esteem.

Studies show spending large amounts of time on social media can be related to mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety. However, it's unclear whether unhealthy social media use leads to mental health problems or whether people with mental health problems tend to use social media excessively or in harmful ways. Another factor to keep in mind is how teens are using social media. Passive use, such as just scrolling through content, is associated with higher depression symptoms. In contrast, active engagement, like commenting or posting, does not show the same negative impact.

Here are some steps you can take to encourage positive social media use:

1. **Set Ground Rules:** Create a family media plan to guide the way your family uses media. Use this link to create a personalized plan for how all kinds of media are used in your home: [bit.ly/KSREMediaPlan](https://bit.ly/KSREMediaPlan)
2. **Engage in Conversations:** Regularly talk with your child about their social media activities, what they enjoy, and any concerns they have encountered.
3. **Model Positive Behavior:** Show healthy social media habits by limiting your use during family time and important activities.
4. **Monitor Use for Younger Children:** Be cautious with social media use for children under 13, follow the platform age requirements.

By understanding the benefits and risks of social media and maintaining open communication, parents can help their children use social media in ways that support their mental health. If you have concerns about your child's mental health, be sure to consult your pediatrician.

For more information on navigating social media and teen mental health visit [healthychildren.org](https://healthychildren.org) or contact Michelle Broxterman, [mbroxterman@ksu.edu](mailto:mbroxterman@ksu.edu), (620)724-8233.

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