SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Social media plays a big role in modern society, especially for young people – but it’s still pretty new. It’s one of the biggest differences about the way you’re growing up and the way your parents, teachers, and other adults in your life grew up. While you might not be able to imagine a world ever existing without social media, researchers are still learning about its impact on mental health.

ALMOST EVERYONE IS ON SOCIAL

Nearly all teenagers – 94% – in developed countries use social media.¹ In the United States, 95% of teens have access to a smartphone and 45% consider themselves to be online “almost constantly.”² There are some good things that come from being well-connected to each other in the virtual world, but it can cause harm as well.

PROS

Identity exploration.
For many young people, especially those in more rural areas, social media can help them figure out who they are and learn from others like them.

Connection.
Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became an important way of staying connected to your friends and family who you couldn’t see in person and making new friends online to help combat loneliness.

Learning new things.
You can’t find new interests and things you love if you don’t know they exist. Social media is a great way to stumble upon new hobbies, interests, trends, tutorials, books – the list goes on.

Taking action.
A lot of times, the issues the world is facing can seem too big and make you feel helpless, but social media can connect you to others for social change and help you make a difference through broader campaigns.

CONS

FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out).
Social media lets you stay tuned in to what others are doing at all times, which can lead to feeling left out if you aren’t invited or just can’t make the plans.

Comparison.
The things you see on social media may make you feel like your life is boring compared to others; you may find yourself comparing your body to photos of others (beware of filters and photoshop!); or you may judge how many likes/comments your posts get compared to other people.

Cyberbullying and harassment.
It is easier to be mean to people from behind a screen, so internet trolls and online bullying from people you know can take place.

Information overload.
The news or the general state of the world might make you feel down, but it can be hard to give yourself space when things are constantly in your news feed. On top of that, it can be hard to know which sources to trust.

Unsafe people.
Sometimes you don’t know if the person you’re talking to is really who they say they are. People may interact through completely fake profiles (catfishing), and others might lie about their reasons for interacting with you.
It can be hard to have a healthy relationship with something that feels unavoidable - and while you can take a break from social media, that doesn't make the problems that come with it disappear.

If you're working toward healthier social media use but can't pull yourself away or notice it always making you feel bad about yourself, take a mental health screen at mhascreening.org to see if you may be dealing with symptoms of a mental health condition.

**SOURCES**