

Drop-in Article

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There is growing evidence linking heavy social media use with increased risks for anxiety and depression. These mental health issues can, in turn, impact a student's school performance, such as difficulties focusing, studying, or even simply attending school. It's important for caregivers and school personnel to understand what is happening on social media and how to reduce its negative impact.

Virtual spaces are everywhere in today's world and have become a constant presence in the lives of young people, offering social connectedness and the ease of instant communication. But the online world of selfies and social media also brings with it challenging situations that can have a negative impact on youth mental health.

The pressure to maintain a perfect online image, fueled by constant comparison to peers, can lead to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. Young people may experience fear of missing out (FOMO) when they watch the highlight reels of their friends' lives, bringing on feelings of loneliness and isolation. In addition, exposure to cyberbullying and negative comments can take a toll on their self-esteem, putting them at risk of experiencing depression.

As the new school year begins, it is crucial for parents, caregivers, teachers, coaches, counselors, and school administrators to work together to educate and support young people in navigating responsibly the challenges of a digital world while fostering a healthy sense of self-worth and resilience.

The new Mental Health America [toolkit](#), "Selfies, Social, and Screens: Navigating Virtual Spaces for Youth," provides educational resources that tackle these topics. For caregivers and school personnel, they cover the basics of what youth are doing online, how online activity can impact mental health, tips for talking to youth about difficult feelings they may experience, and how to help young people reduce the potentially harmful effects of social media.

The toolkit also includes information and tips written exclusively for youth. Whether young people read the information on their own or discuss the topics with an adult, it is important they understand that they are not alone when they experience feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness and that help and support are available.

Free, confidential, anonymous screening tools are available at mhascreening.org for youth and parents who are concerned about their mental health. After taking a screen, results are provided along with tips for next steps. For even more information, youth and adults can check out [MHA's book](#), "Where to Start: A Survival Guide to Anxiety, Depression, and Other Mental Health Challenges," which was written for young people in order to provide clear, honest, and reassuring information about the most common mental health conditions.

Sometimes conversations about mental health can reveal that a young person has thoughts or plans to hurt themselves or another person. If this happens, they are in crisis and need help promptly. If you think a child or teen is in immediate danger of taking suicidal action, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988. Trained crisis counselors can help find local resources and suggest next steps.

