



Key Messages

VIRTUAL ACTIVITY CAN AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH

- Children and teens are dealing with the intense emotions of growing up in a digital age where much of their lives are spent online.
- Social media and other online activities are not going anywhere anytime soon. Adults can help youth in this virtual world through various means, including helping them clean up content feeds, explaining that profiles and pictures can be curated to show only the best of a person's life, and being mindful that algorithms can lead to dangerous content if not careful.
- Fear of missing out (FOMO), comparing themselves to others on social media, and cyberbullying can have a profound negative impact on a young person's mental health. However, supportive online communities can help young people feel less alone when they find it difficult to connect to those physically around them.
- Adults can and should prepare children and teens to protect themselves online, and then be there to help them understand what they're seeing and hearing to minimize negative effects on mental health.

MHA RESOURCES

- Mental Health America has developed its 2023 Back-to-School Toolkit and campaign to help increase understanding of how online activity affects the mental health of children and teens. Mental Health America is providing materials on these topics for parents and caregivers, school personnel, other adults in a young person's life, and young people.
- When the online world gets overwhelming, one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine whether you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition is to take an anonymous screen at www.mhascreening.org.
- Mental Health America has online screening tools, including one that is youth-focused and one for parents. After the screen, Mental Health America will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps based on your results.
- Starting the mental health journey doesn't have to be confusing. Mental Health America's new book, "[Where to Start](#)," breaks down mental health terms in a jargon-free and even humorous way. Youth and adults alike can check on their symptoms, learn how to talk about mental health needs, find out about help options, and discover tips to care for themselves.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

- Knowing and addressing early signs of mental health conditions can increase the chances of recovery and positive outcomes.
- Because so much time is spent in the classroom, teachers and other school personnel may be the first to notice symptoms of depression and anxiety in students, and it is important to let children and teens know that support is available.
- The combined efforts of parents, teachers, and other adults can significantly improve the well-being of students. Working together to educate about mental health and online behavior, as well as acting as good models of what to do, can positively impact a young person.
- Parents, teachers, coaches, and other adults in a young person's life can provide different perspectives on a child's behavior. By sharing information, a clearer picture of the student's well-being can be established.
- Consistent support from both home and school can be crucial in helping students feel secure, understood, and open up about their feelings. However, if a young person isn't getting that support in one area of their life, having one or a few adults to lean on makes a huge difference.
- School personnel and parents/caregivers can work together to find help for students who are struggling through mental health professionals, such as school psychologists or outside therapists.

Feel free to supplement these key messages with language from the fact sheets and other materials included in this toolkit.

