

Social Media Causes Isolation in Teens

Social media was originally thought to be something that would expand our worldview and help us feel connected to people who don't live in our neighborhood. With only a few swipes on their smartphones, teens can now meet more people, develop relationships and have more opportunities for seeing beyond the world around them... or so it may seem. What's actually happening is that **they are becoming more sheltered and less independent than any generation before them.**¹

According to social psychologist Jean Twenge:

- ♥ Today's 12th graders spend less time outside of the house without their parents than 8th graders did in 2009.¹
- ♥ The number of teens who spend time daily with friends dropped by 40% between 2000 and 2015.¹ (Smartphones became popular around 2012.)¹
- ♥ Only 55% of high school seniors have jobs when school is in session, compared to 77% during the late 1970s.¹
- ♥ Teens are also driving less and depending on parents more for rides.¹

This isolation has had a painful effect on our teenagers. Jean Twenge states that **rates of depression and suicide are so high that members of Generation Z are "on the brink of the worst mental health crisis in decades."**¹ How did this happen? Listed below are some ways that social media harms teens.

- ♥ **Social media prevents teens from learning or practicing social skills.** The teen years are when the social skills necessary for adulthood are learned, practiced and improved. Because of social media, teens don't get the chance to put in the work of getting to know a person because everything about that person is already posted and on display.
- ♥ **Because of social media, being ignored is now intensified.** With all the ways teens communicate instantly through their phones and can see if their messages have been read, teens know when they are being ignored. Because teens lack impulse control, they often reply immediately and they expect the same of their peers. When a teen sees that a friend is ignoring them, the teen feels anxious, ignored, frustrated and unimportant.
- ♥ **Social media makes it very easy for teens to know when they're being left out.** When today's adults were teens, we didn't know we were left out of gathering unless someone told us or we overheard someone talking about it. Missing out hurts. These days, all a teen has to do is open their favorite app to see what their friends are doing without them – and others can see it, too. Knowing instantly that they have been left out and that others know about it – even while the event is still happening – can be devastating for a teen.
- ♥ **Social media makes it difficult for teens to consider other points-of-view.** Social media platforms like Tumblr encourage people to only interact with people who think like they think. If teens are only talking to other teens who also feel lonely and depressed, they won't hear different points-of-view. Because their brains are still developing, teens can't see beyond the situation they are experiencing. When they talk only to other teens who feel as they feel, they don't realize that people actually care about and will listen to them.
- ♥ **Social media can harm a teen's already-fragile self-image.** People tend to post only the photos and details about their lives that they want others to see. Because teens don't understand that what they see online isn't real, they compare their own lives to the perfect, happy lives they see and feel they can't measure up to others. This leads to feelings of insecurity, jealousy, loneliness and depression. The problem gets worse when a teen receives "likes" and praise on a fake life they show online because it supports their belief that their regular lives aren't good enough. It's a vicious cycle.
- ♥ **Quality time and relationships suffer when social media is a priority.** People tend to pay attention to others who are not present more than the people who are right in front of them. We've all ignored things in our lives because we were playing on our phones. Teens are no exception; when they are distracted by an app or texting with friends, they aren't spending time strengthening relationships with the people who are physically around and care about them – their families.

Now that you know how the damage happens, visit the blog at www.RAYSAC.org for tips on how to help.

1. <http://fortune.com/2017/08/06/generation-z-smartphone-depression/>

Parents, pay attention to your teen's social media use. They need your help to be safe!