

Social Media & Adolescent Mental Health

Key Takeaways for General Pediatricians

1. The Relationship Between Social Media & Mental Health is Complex

- No simple “good” or “bad” conclusion—impact varies by **individual use, content, and context**.
- Three main hypotheses:
 - **Negative linear:** More social media = worse mental health (some studies support this).
 - **No relationship:** Moderate use shows little to no effect.
 - **It’s complicated:** Quality of use is more important than quantity.

2. The 5 Cs of Healthy Media Use

Use these **guiding principles** when counseling families:

- **Child:** Understand each adolescent’s unique media habits.
- **Content:** What they consume matters—encourage **age-appropriate, positive** content.
- **Calm:** Media use for relaxation should be **intentional**, not a default coping mechanism.
- **Crowding out:** Screen time should not interfere with **sleep, physical activity, or real-life interactions**.
- **Communication:** Parents should engage in **open, ongoing conversations** about media use.

3. Recommendations for Pediatricians

- ✓ **Ask open-ended questions:** "What’s your media use like these days?"
- ✓ **Encourage digital literacy:** Help teens assess content for accuracy & bias.
- ✓ **Promote balance:** Guide families in creating a **Family Media Plan** (AAP resource).
- ✓ **Support parental involvement:** Co-viewing, setting boundaries, and modeling healthy media habits.
- ✓ **Address mental health concerns:** Look for signs of **problematic use, anxiety, or social withdrawal** linked to social media.

◆ **Takeaway:** Not all screen time is harmful—context, quality, and family engagement matter most!

Resources:

- **AAP Family Media Plan:** www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan
- **Common Sense Media Ratings:** www.commonsensemedia.org