

# Social Media and Youth Mental Health

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023



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# Agenda

- **Setting the Stage: Thinking about Social Media**
- **What is a Surgeon General's Advisory?**
- **Overview of the Advisory**
  - **Social Media and Youth Mental Health**
  - **Potential Benefits of Social Media**
  - **Potential Harms of Social Media**
  - **What can Parents and Caregivers do?**
  - **What can Children and Adolescents do?**
- **Q & A**



# Setting the Stage



# What is a Surgeon General's Advisory?

**“A Surgeon General’s Advisory is a public statement that calls the American people’s attention to an urgent public health issue and provides recommendations for how it should be addressed. Advisories are reserved for significant public health challenges that require the nation’s immediate awareness and action”**

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# Social Media Data

- **Up to 95% of youth ages 13-17 report using a Social Media platform.**
- **More than  $\frac{1}{3}$  report almost constant use.**
- **Approximately 40% of children 8-12 use Social Media.**
- **“At this time, we do not yet have enough evidence to determine if social media is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents”.**

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# Social Media Data

- **Survey conducted this fall indicated:**
  - **YouTube is the most widely used platform**
  - **TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram remain popular**
  - **Other common platforms include Facebook, Discord, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), Twitch, Reddit and BeReal**
  - **Nearly half of teens use the Internet “almost constantly” throughout the day**
  - **More than 90% report daily use (Anderson et al, 2023)**
- **As of 2021, the average Gr. 8 and Gr. 10 students spent 3.5 hours/day on Social Media, 25 % spent 5 plus hours/day, 1 in 7 spent 7 plus hours/day (Miech et al, 2021)**



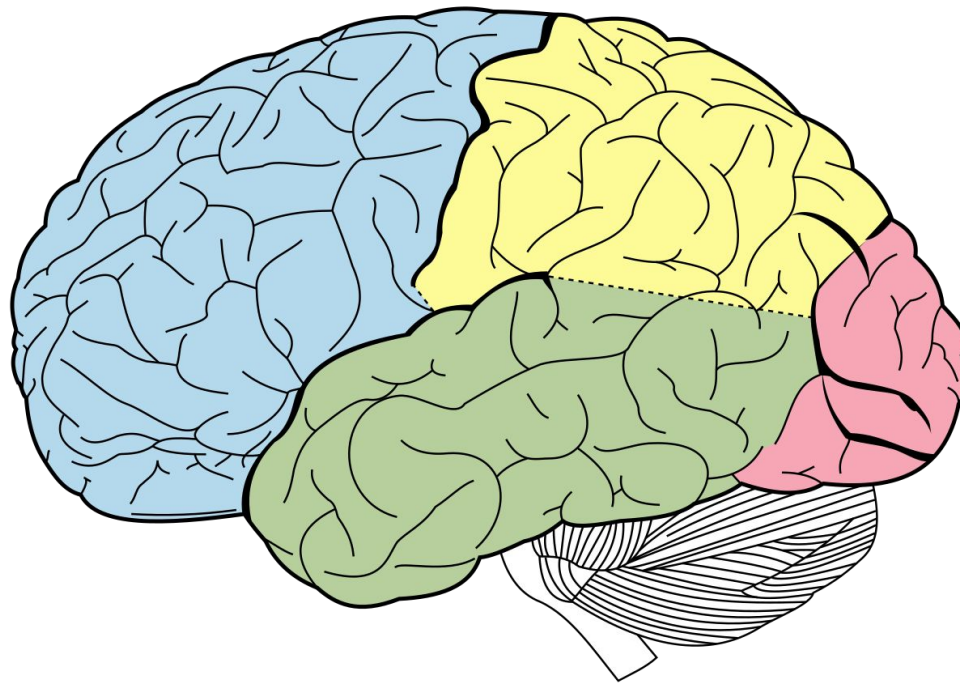
# There are positive and negative impacts

- **Many complex factors mediate the influence of social media, including:**
  - **Amount of time**
  - **Type of content**
  - **Activities and interactions on social media**
  - **Degree to which it replaces/disrupts other health promoting activities**
  - **Individual differences**
  - **Brain development**

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# The brain



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lobes\\_of\\_the\\_brain\\_NL.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lobes_of_the_brain_NL.svg)



# Potential Benefits

- **Positive community and connections**
- **Ability to form and maintain friendships**
- **Connection with more diverse peer group**
- **Can be platform for Mental Health interventions and help seeking behaviour**
- **Majority of adolescents report:**
  - **Social media helps them feel more accepted**
  - **That they have people who can support them through tough times**
  - **They have a place to show their creative side**
  - **They are more connected to what's going on in their friend's lives**

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# Potential Harms

- **A US study of adolescents age 12-15 found that spending more than 3 hours per day on social media doubled the risk of symptoms of depression and anxiety (Riehm et al, 2019)**
- **Higher level of concern for adolescent girls, those already struggling with mental health concerns, body image and disordered eating and for those with sleep problems.**

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# Potential Harms

- **Content Exposure: Extreme, inappropriate and harmful content**
  - **Social Comparison**
  - **FOMO**
- **Excessive and Problematic Use**
  - **Sleep**
  - **Social engagement**
  - **Boredom**
  - **Reward centres in the brain**
  - **Linked to sleep and attention problems**
    - Almost  $\frac{1}{3}$  adolescents report using screens until midnight or later on a typical weekday. (Rideout et al, 2018)

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# What we don't know:

- **How does the impact on our health of interactions differ when they are in person versus on social media?**
- **What are the pathways through which harm may be caused?**
- **What type of content and pattern of use causes the most harm?**
- **What are the benefits?**
- **What might maximize the benefits and protect youth from harm?**
- **How does the user's developmental stage mediate the impact?**

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# What can parents/caregivers do?

- **Create agreed upon family expectations about social media use (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018)**
- **Restrict electronics before bed and keep them out of bedrooms**
- **Create tech-free zones**
- **Teach kids about responsible technology use (American Psychological Association, 2019)**
- **Create shared norms and practices around social media with other parents**

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# Anecdotal thoughts

- Snapchat, Instagram, VSCO, Twitch, Discord
- Students often use platforms their parents aren't aware of
- Online “friends” that they've never met IRL
- Feeling responsible for their friend's mental health
- Pervasiveness in their lives
- Impact on social skills
- Snap scores
- Making conflict worse
- Inappropriate photos



# 24 Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth

- **For optimal health benefits, in a 24 hour period, children and youth (5-17) should have:**
  - **60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity**
  - **Several hours of light physical activity**
  - **Sleep uninterrupted for 8 to 11 hours, depending on age**
  - **No more than 2 hours per day of recreational screen time**

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines  
for Children and Youth, CSEP, 2021





***“Nearly every teenager in America uses social media, and yet we do not have enough evidence to conclude that it is sufficiently safe for them. Our children have become unknowing participants in a decades-long experiment”***

(Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023).



# Questions?



# References

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