

Protecting Los Angeles County Youth from Negative Impacts of Social Media

While social media is almost universally used by youth ages 13-17 and widely used by children in the 8-12 age group, we are still in the nascent phases of understanding the full scope of negative implications social media use has on youth mental health, development, and wellbeing. However, preliminary research and data suggests that youth face several negative, serious, and lasting impacts due to use of social media.

Research has indicated that, since brain development occurring during adolescence renders youth particularly vulnerable, youth may face heightened emotional sensitivity to communications and interactions that they are subjected to on social media platforms, as compared to their adult counterparts. The social media industry is largely unregulated and profits rely on mass and continued engagement by consumers, including children. As a result, social media platforms utilize tools designed to maximize user engagement, such sophisticated algorithms that provide content based on user data, push notifications, “like” counts, and autoplay functions. Studies

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have shown that these tools used to maximize engagement for profit purposes can lead to excessive use of social media by youth, resulting in habit formation and changes in brain structure similar to changes seen in the brains of individuals with substance use or gambling addictions.

On March 23, 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek H. Murthy, issued a 25-page [Advisory](#) calling attention to the growing concerns about the effects of social media on youth mental health. The Advisory was developed through a substantial review of currently available evidence, including research articles and resources suggested by subject matter experts, and describes youth mental health and wellbeing concerns that are emerging. The Advisory warns of the prolific negative effects of social media on youth mental health, while acknowledging that the full scope and scale of the impact of social media on mental health and wellbeing is still not fully appreciated, due to lack of access to data and lack of transparency on the part of social media technology companies.

Nevertheless, even the limited research and data available have revealed shocking concerns associated with youth exposure social media. Use of social media by youth has resulted in social comparison, social pressures, cyberbullying, low self-esteem, and sleep deprivation—all of which fuel increases in mental, emotional, behavioral, and developmental disorders, including increased depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

The Advisory calls for acknowledgement of the growing body of research about potential harms of social media so that we can increase our collective understanding of the risks associated with social media use and urgently take action to create safe and healthy digital environments that minimize harm and safeguard the mental health of

children and adolescents, including their wellbeing during critical developmental stages.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Mental Health, in collaboration with Los Angeles County Office of Education, to:

1. Develop and distribute media literacy curricula and materials centered around the harms associated with the use of social media by youth, practical ways to mitigate identified harms, and readily available resources that affected youth can access;
2. Utilize the Department of Mental Health's Youth Ambassador Program to amplify and distribute these resources.

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