

Social Media Use Linked to Depression in Teens

For plenty of teenagers, a chunk of time is spent daily catching up with friends on social media. Now new research is sounding the alarm, linking increased social media use with the development of depression symptoms in teens and pre-teens.

A study published in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics* found that for every additional hour young people reported spending on social media, the severity of depressive symptoms they experienced went up.

Chris Cashen is the Behavioral Health Coordinator for OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center. He says these findings aren't surprising.

"As of several years ago, there were X amount of referrals to the social workers, to the counselors, and so forth, and that has gone up tremendously, and much of it is linked to conflict over social media," explained Cashen. "And so the conflict creates emotional distress, which if somebody is somewhat vulnerable, can then also lead to diagnosable anxiety, depression and so forth."

To combat this, Cashen says parents need to be engaged in the lives of their teens, including how much time their kids spend scrolling. He suggests an open door policy with technology.

"I do like privacy and confidentiality and so forth, but I suggest to parents to tell the kids that they should have no 100% expectation of privacy, that parents should go through their phones, perhaps not all the time, but a spot check here and there. If things seem okay they can check less. If things are not okay, they check more."

Cashen says there are symptoms of depression that parents can watch out for as well, including a change in mood, a drop in grades, drastic changes in eating habits, declining interest in hobbies or activities, and withdrawing from friends and family. He says teen years are an important indicator of mental health as a young adult.

"If a person has a depressive episode as a teenager, they're significantly more likely to have another one as an adult, particularly compared to a kid who has not had a depressive episode."

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, the best thing you can do is talk to your kid about your worries. Cashen encourages parents to be direct and ask blunt questions, like, "Have you had thoughts about killing yourself?" He says for many kids, having someone ask is a relief.

"I would be very direct about it: Have you been sad? Have you been upset? Have you had more conflict with your friends? Is there a reason why your grades have gone down? Is there a reason why you're not hanging out with people? Why didn't you want to play baseball or softball this year?" he suggested.

If you believe your child is struggling with depression or any other mental health issue, help is available. OSF HealthCare Behavioral Health provides outpatient-based counseling services for people of all ages, from infants to the elderly. You can learn more by clicking [here](#), or by calling (309) 664-3130.