



Social Media Safety

Resources for Students & Families



Facts & Data

According to Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) results from 2023, 69.8% of Washington 10th grade students report having three or more hours of screen time per day.

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) has been linked to stress, fewer positive health behaviors, and poor academics performance. Since 2021, HYS has included a 3-item Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screen Scale (PRIUSS) to help assess risk for PIU among students. In 2023, 40% of Grade 8 students, 47% of Grade 10 students, and 50% of Grade 12 students were at risk for problematic Internet use.

The US Surgeon General reported that U.S. adolescents aged 12-15 who spent more than three hours per day on social media faced double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety.

The American Psychological Association recommends that adults inquire about and monitor the social media use of youths and adolescents.

Action Items

- Make sure online privacy settings are set to the most secure level.
- Talk with students about how social media makes them feel. Explain that social media platforms are designed to be addictive. Help students determine what content is real and what content is questionable, and empower them to make informed choices. There's great tips in conversation starters!
- Help students report cyberbullying and other harmful content, and talk to them about why it's important for them not to spread it themselves.
- Encourage students and families to create a family media plan that includes engagement in both positive uses of social media and tech-free activities.
- Set a good example by modeling responsible social media use.

Conversation Starters

- What did you see on social media this week? What do you think those posts meant?
- How does social media make you feel? Is it more positive, negative, or a mix of both?
- How much information about you is available on the social media platforms you use? Are we both comfortable with the information and images that are available to strangers?
- Do you feel that your social media use interferes with your schoolwork, extracurricular activities, or friendships?
- How can you tell when you might need a break from social media?
- What are some things you can do to help you have a positive experience when using social media and resist the pressure to always be connected?

Additional Resources

- Parent Guides: Connect Safely, a nonprofit organization, provides guidebooks on apps, services, and platforms popular with youths and adolescents.
- Family Media Plan: This resource from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guides families through creating a media plan.
- National Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health: Part of the AAP, this organization provides evidence-based education to support the mental health of youth as they navigate social media.
- The SIFT Method: Provides steps that students can practice when encountering questionable content and interacting with misinformation online.
- The Family Online Safety Institute: This is an international non-profit organization working to make the online world safer for kids and their families by providing a hub of resources and articles.

