

Fact Sheet: Child & Youth Problematic Use of Social Networking

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

What Is Social Networking?

Social networking involves sharing ideas, photos, videos, messages, and engaging in activities such as chatting, dating, emailing, and socializing within an online community. This occurs through various platforms, including applications, websites, and social media.

How Common is the Use of Social Networking in Children & Youth?

- As of 2025, more than 32 million Canadians use social media.
- Social networking among teens has dramatically increased since 2012. In particular, the rate of daily use has doubled, between 2012-2018, with 43% of teens using social media hourly.
- The most popular and time-consuming social networking sites are TikTok, Reddit, Facebook, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, X (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube, and Snapchat.
- TikTok remains one of the most influential social media platforms among children and youth, thanks to its user-friendly design and algorithm-driven personalized content. In January 2025, the U.S. temporarily banned TikTok following the passage of a law citing national security concerns related to its Chinese ownership. The ban led to widespread disruption for users and content creators, sparking debates around freedom of expression, digital rights, and data privacy. Many youths and teens, who rely on TikTok for connection, entertainment, and self-expression, reported feelings of frustration, isolation, and loss of community. While Canada did not implement a nationwide ban, TikTok continues to face growing scrutiny from Canadian authorities regarding privacy practices and youth safety.

Prevalence & Trends

- People who are young, single, experiencing relationship difficulties, and have underlying mental health issues tend to be at greater risk for problematic use of social networking sites.
- Overuse of social networking platforms, particularly among youth, negatively impacts life satisfaction, leading to issues like sedentary lifestyles, sleep disturbances, and isolation.
- Children and youth are at risk of cyberbullying, and exposure to harmful sexual content. Cyberbullying and sexting are most often perpetrated by other teens.

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<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx>

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Why Is Social Media Use a Concern for Children & Youth?

- Excessive and problematic use can impact physical, emotional, financial, social, and educational well-being
- Exposure and sharing of inappropriate information and material (sexting, pornography)
- Negative influence of social media on body image
- Sourcing of harmful content or advice, such as websites or social networks promoting self-harm
- Negative impact on mental health and well-being
- Reduced bonding with families and friends
- Vulnerability to cyber-crime and bullying.

What Questions Might Be Helpful to My Client or Their Family?

- Are things out of balance, because of digital technology use in your major life areas such as family and peer relationships, school, employment, finances, and health (sleep/exercise/diet)?
- Have you experienced increased conflict in relationships because of problematic digital technology use?
- Have you ever felt you or a family member needed to cut down on digital technology use?
- What strategies or practices have previously helped your family maintain healthier habits?

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