

Fact Sheet: Child and Youth Problematic Use of Social Networking

What is Social Networking?

Social networking is the act of sharing ideas, photos or videos, messaging, chatting, dating, emailing, and socializing in an online community using applications, websites, social media sites and computer programs.

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

- In Canada, the number of social network users is projected to reach 32.07 million users in 2023.
- Social networking by teens has increased dramatically 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 Reddit, Facebook, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, and Snapchat.

Prevalence and 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.
- The overuse of social networking sites directly impacts youths' life satisfaction. Negative effects include a sedentary lifestyle, sleep disturbance, and isolation.
- Children and youth are victims of cyberbullying, as well as being exposed to disturbing sexual content. Cyberbullying and sexting are most often perpetrated by other teens.

Why is Social Media Use a Concern for Children and Youth?

- Excessive and problematic use can impact on 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.
- Less bonding with families and friends.
- Exposure to cyber-crime and bullying.

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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 have you done in the past that has helped your family to be healthier?