

Social Media and Youth Mental Health

2026

Research findings indicate social media use contributes to negative mental health outcomes in children and adolescents, particularly high amounts of use, though not as a sole causal factor. Specific social media uses are also associated with positive mental health outcomes.

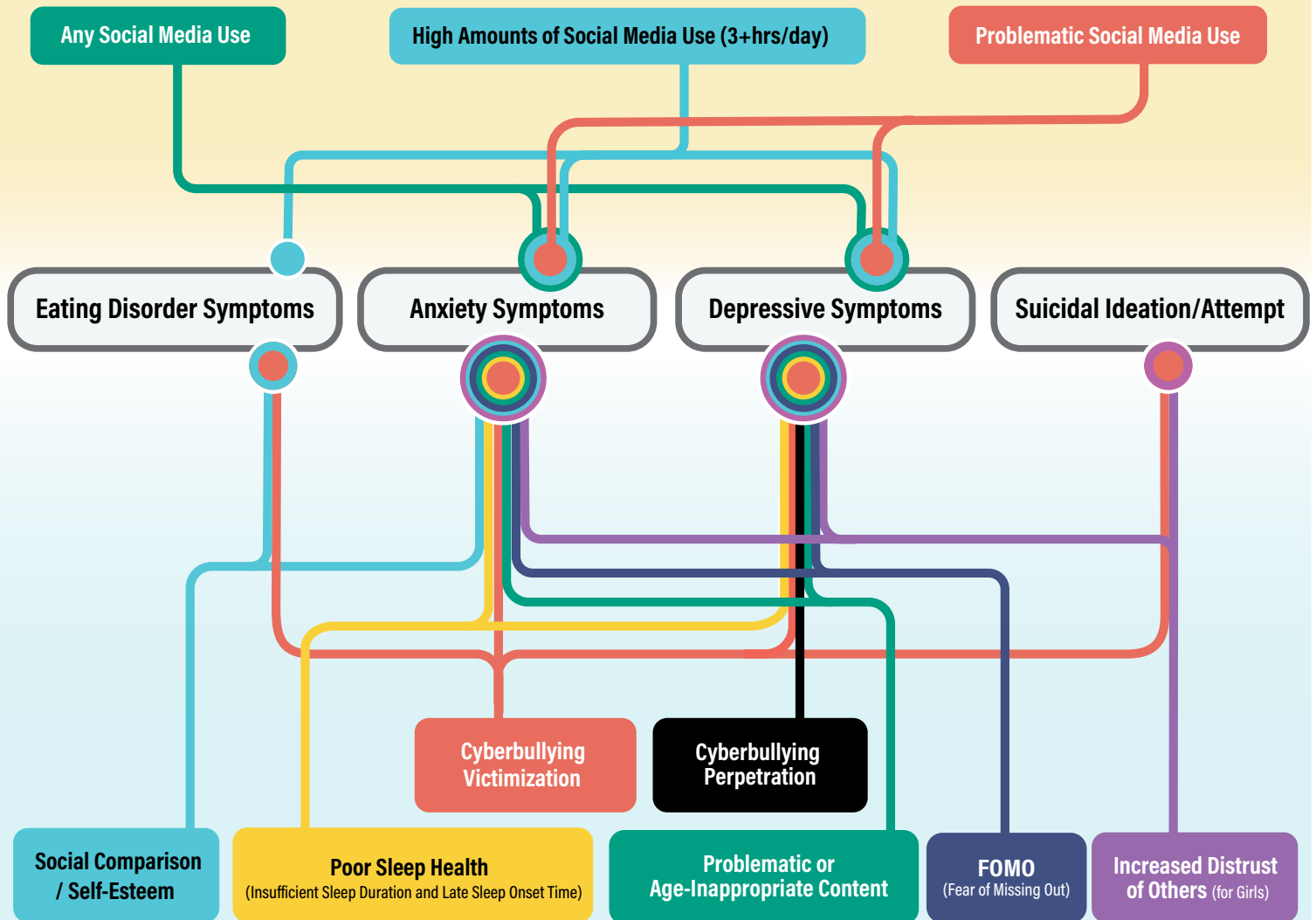
(Cunningham et al., 2021; Curle et al., 2026; Pew Research Center, 2025; Piteo & Ward, 2020)

Nearly two-thirds of 11-12 year olds report having social media accounts in 2025, despite most major platforms officially prohibiting users under age 13.

(Nagata et al., 2025b)

How is social media use associated with poor mental health?

Research has found consistent moderate associations between social media use and mental health symptoms. The strength of this association intensifies with higher amounts and more compulsive use of social media.





Who is most vulnerable to poor mental health effects of social media use?

Girls - Associations between social media use and depressive/anxiety symptom severity are stronger in girls than in boys and transgender/gender-diverse youth.

Early adolescents (ages 11-15) - Associations between social media and depression are stronger in early adolescence.

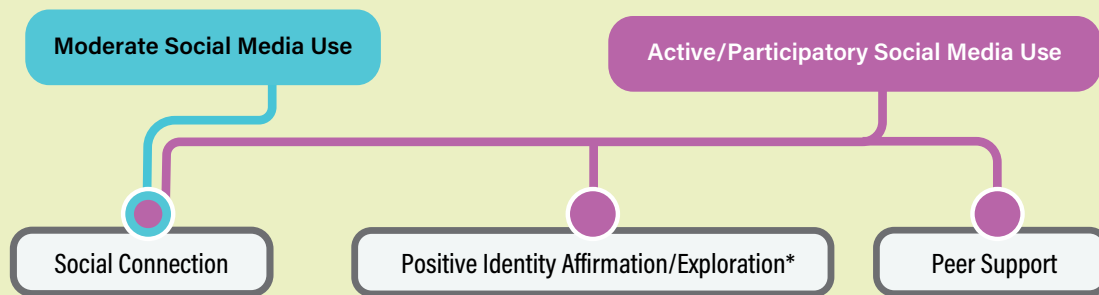
Racial minority youth - Experiencing direct or daily discrimination online increases the risk for poor mental health and suicidal ideation.

Transgender and sexual/gender minority youth - Higher odds of cyberbullying victimization increase the risk for related poor mental health.

(Baba et al., 2025; Kingsbury & Arim, 2023; Nagata et al., 2024; Pew Research Center, 2025; Polanco-Roman et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2022; Tynes et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025)



What type of social media use is associated with positive mental health?



* Particularly for racial minority and LGBTQ+ youth

(Avci, Baams, & Kretschmer, 2024; Hopelab & Common Sense Media, 2024; Nagata et al., 2025a; Pew Research Center, 2025)



What Do Teens Say?

Teen girls are more likely than boys to say social media harms their mental health (25% vs. 14%), confidence (20% vs. 10%), and sleep (50% vs. 40%).



“Worse for peers than me”

Teens seem to have more positive views of their own social media use than their peers:

- » Teens are more than twice as likely to say social media have a positive impact on themselves than on their peers (28% vs. 11%).
- » Nearly half of teens (48%) say social media platforms have a mostly negative effect on people their age.



Adolescents with internalizing conditions (inward-facing conditions including anxiety and depression) report more time on social media, more social comparison, and greater impact of social media feedback on mood, alongside lower happiness about number of online friends than adolescents without these conditions.



From the “Facebook Files”

Leaked internal studies from Facebook showed:

- » 13.5% of U.K. teen girls said Instagram worsened suicidal thoughts.
- » 17% of teen girls said their eating disorder symptoms got worse after Instagram use.

(Fassi et al., 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025; Wells et al., 2021)

