

Facebook — Fun, Harmful or Both?

About 500 million people use Facebook. This popular social media site connects family, friends and strangers. It has changed how teens mingle with one another. For many teens, Facebook is their main social contact with other teens.

Facebook and other social media sites can be fun and helpful. Teens share pictures, stories and ideas. However, doctors worry that these sites can also have a negative effect. Social media has been linked to depression. Doctors are not sure if “Facebook depression” is a specific type of depression. It could be just an extension of a teen’s depressed mood.

A PEW Research Center study report that:

- 71% of teens use Facebook.
- Over 50% of teens log on several times a day.
- 75% of teens own or have access to a smartphone.
- 52% of teens use Instagram.
- 92% of teens go online daily.
- 24% of teens go online almost constantly.

With smartphone and tablet use, teens do not need to meet in each other’s homes. They meet online instead.

For teens with depression and poor self-esteem, Facebook can be harsh. They do not get a clear picture of what is happening. When teens chat online, they do not see facial expressions. They cannot read body language. Is what being said a joke – a lie? Was it just a thoughtless comment? Teens act on impulse. They often say and do things without thinking of the consequences.

Social media sites can become a popularity contest. Kids often compete for and want the most friends, comments and tagged pictures. Teens with few friends may feel inadequate – sad.

It is common for teens to write nasty messages on Facebook “walls” of teens they do not like. *In fact, online bullying continues to be a problem.* Teens have been known to commit suicide after being bullied online.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests parents:

- Discuss social media risks with their teens. Include cyberbullying, sexting and addiction.
- Learn about social media and what their teen knows about it.
- Tell their teen they expect good online behavior.
- Be watchful and ask their teen about their online activity.



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