



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 31, 2011

## Pediatrics Report Warns of “Facebook Depression” Among Teens

A recent report from American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) warns that teens who spend too much time texting and surfing social media websites may be placing themselves at greater risk for depression. While Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and other social media sites can help young people keep in touch with friends and relatives, the report in the April issue of Pediatrics noted that too much time on such sites, along with other online activities such as texting and instant messaging, can keep young people isolated and may lead to depression.



One study found that 22 percent of teens check in to Facebook more than 10 times per day. Additionally, 75 percent of adolescents have cell phones, which they use for texting and messaging. Facebook, by far the most popular social media website, currently boasts more than 500 million active users, with one survey finding that over 11 percent of those users are under 18 years old.

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That glut of online opportunity can put teens at risk for what the report’s authors call “Facebook depression,” which can occur as young people play out the sometimes painful process of interacting with friends and peers in the isolated online atmosphere — often without the crucial oversight of parents who provide necessary filters to their experiences.

Dr. Gwenn O’Keeffe, a pediatrician and lead author of the study, said that many teens spend hours interacting with friends and others via social media and other digital technology, foregoing crucial face-to-face social interaction with peers. “A large part of this generation’s social and emotional development is occurring while on the Internet and on cell phones,” O’Keeffe wrote in the report, adding that sites such as Facebook “is where all the teens are hanging out now. It’s their corner store.”

While such online phenomena as teen “cyber-bullying” tend to be overblown by the media, other online ills have real potential for harming young people, including the way in which Facebook relationships can leave them feeling isolated and inferior. “Acceptance by and contact with peers is an important element of adolescent life,” the report notes. “The intensity of the online world is thought to be a factor that may trigger depression in some adolescents.”

Such considerations as the number of Facebook “friends” (most of whom are unknown contacts) a teen has compared to others can contribute to feelings of inferiority on the part of some adolescents. In addition, viewing the constantly changing “status reports” of friends and others on the site, along with photos showing friends and others in happy and fun situations, can have the effect of leaving many young people feeling isolated and lonely.

In a recent blog posting, Rhett Smith, a therapist and pastor, said that the AAP report confirms what many concerned parents and clergy have been sensing for some time. “One of the glaring paradoxes in



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my use of technology/social media, is that it has both the ability to make me feel connected and intimate with others, while at the same time feeling isolated, alienated and lonely,” Smith was quoted by the [Christian Post](#) as saying. “Has all the technology relationally disconnected us in a sense, replacing the processes (befriending, getting to know each other, sharing life, etc.), where instead we just value the end results (number of followers, blog traffic, etc.)?”

O’Keefe said that the key for parents to helping their teen children navigate the sometimes painful and competitive social media environment is to “understand these technologies so they can relate to their children’s online world — and comfortably parent in that world.” She added that many young people “find the lure of social media difficult to resist, which can interfere with homework, sleep, and physical activity. Parents need to understand how their child is using social media so that they can set appropriate limits.”



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