

KIDS AND TEENS: ONLINE ADDICTION IS A THING

Did you know online addiction is real, and it can seriously affect you? Addiction isn't just about drugs and alcohol. Addiction can also be obsessing over and overusing electronics and social media.

Online predators and predatory groups know that online addiction is real and use that knowledge to their advantage. They depend on a person's need to be online continuously, preying on those who struggle to disconnect. Just as you may be great at math, sports, singing or other activities; these master manipulators make it their full-time job to find and then exploit you and your peers online.

The Allure of Social Media and Gaming

Online addiction is characterized as excessive and compulsive use of social media platforms that interferes with your daily functioning — school, sleep, real-life interactions and mental health. **Too much time spent on social media leads to depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem and sleep issues in kids¹.**

95%

of 13–17 year olds report using social media platforms².

45%

of teens say they spend too much time on social media³.

48%

of teens say social media harms people their age.

↑ Up from **32%** in 2022³.

Warning Signs2Identify

These are indicators that you may be experiencing online dependency:

Compulsive checking: A strong urge to frequently check social media.

Hard time disconnecting: Struggling to disconnect from apps and social media.

Less IRL: Decreased participation in offline activities.

Mood changes: Noticeable mood changes, especially when not using social media.

Dealing with FOMO: Experiencing discomfort or anxiety when unable to access social media.

Increased drama: Arguments or tension arising from social media use.

Steps2Take

Here are steps to take to set healthy #DigitalBoundaries:

Find positive offline activities: An online gaming session could become an in-person activity with a friend or family member — play a board game, get some friends together to play sports or watch a movie with your family.

Manage your screentime: Create device-free zones such as your bedroom, during your commute to and from school and mealtimes with friends and family.

Take regular breaks: Too much time on any one app or game can be harmful to your self-esteem. It's important to take breaks and connect IRL with your friends and family offline.

Train your brain without a device: Consider regulating your emotions offline to relax, get happy and regroup. Get outside — go for a walk, ride a bike, practice your favorite sport or just take a break from your device!

¹ hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf

² pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022

³ pewresearch.org/internet/2025/04/22/teens-social-media-and-mental-health