



# SUICIDE And Social Media

A tipsheet for parents and providers



A M E R I C A N  
ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY

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## TAKING THE FIRST STEP

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Mental health, non-suicidal self-harm, and suicide themes on social media continue to be an issue both youth and adults face on a daily basis. Experts recognize that youth engagement with social media includes positive and negative aspects and our goal is to help maximize the benefits while reducing any potential harm. Parents need to have tools for these conversations. As such, AAS has teamed up with physicians and subject matter experts to put together this list for anyone to help youth who come in contact with this digital content.

## TIPS FOR ADULTS

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- As digital immigrants, parents should educate themselves about current social media trends and uses. What apps and websites are popular with youth? Which platforms are children in the household using and how many accounts do they have? Which platforms do they use to talk with their friends and which ones are more for recreation?
- Parents should monitor their child's access to and use of the internet and social media. When, why and how much monitoring depends on their child's developmental stage and mental health status.
- We don't believe it's good for anyone to be constantly consuming images of violence, self-directed or upon others.
- Some children are going to be more vulnerable than others.
- Parents and pediatricians should be asking youth, especially vulnerable youth, about their digital lives, their experiences with social media, and how it impacts their daily lives.

## TIPS (CONT.)

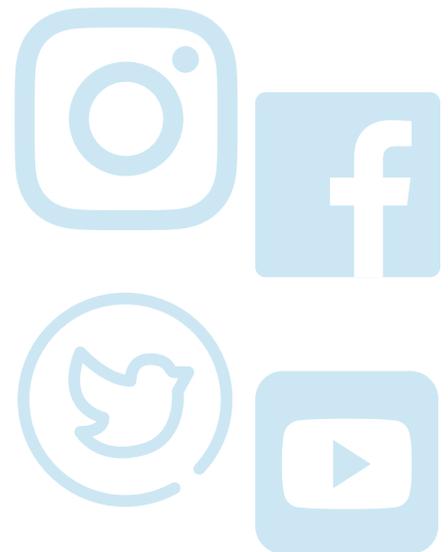
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- If a healthcare/behavioral healthcare provider is performing a crisis intervention safety plan, asking about digital lives/social media use should absolutely be included as a component.
- Youth report enjoyment and a sense of connection from social media engagement. When exploring their digital lives, it is just as important to explore the positive aspects as any potential negative effects.
- When in doubt, clinicians, parents, teachers or other caregivers should be willing to consult with experts or mental health professionals. AAS has dozens of expert members willing to provide consultation on a number of these topics.
- As parents and physicians take increasingly active roles in suicide prevention, we also ask that social media platforms join us on a larger scale in preventing suicide across the globe. AAS is proud to have cross-industry members of our Technology and Innovations Committee, which is available for consultation and advisory capacities.

## PARENTAL CONTROL TOOLS

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- Cell phone plan carriers – Typically mobile carriers (AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, etc.) provide free parental control options that can limit the amount of time spent on social media, what platforms teens can access, and what hours they can be online
- Hardware – There are dozens of products that allow a parent or care provider to turn on, disable, throttle or put time limits on WiFi access in the house or on individual devices.
- Internet filters – Most internet service providers allow you to filter content to limit access to age-restricted images or access to specific social media sites.



An important component of these tools is monitoring and adapting use. Depending on household use of internet and social media, especially in potentially concerning uses, some boundaries may need to be expanded, enforced, or relaxed.