ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE, PERSONAL SCREEN TIME, AND MENTAL HEALTH INDICATORS AMONG CANADIAN YOUTH

The impact of social media use and personal screen time on children, tweens, and teens.

Information Compiled on 17 January 2026

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for the

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https://www.mhrc.ca/blog-research-brief/associations-between-social-media-use-personal-screen-time-and-mental-health-indicators-among-canadian-youth

(Click on this link to download a pdf version of this entire report)

This report is a focused analysis of how social media use, personal screen time, and cybervictimization relate to youth mental health outcomes in Canada.

Drawing from over 27,000 responses to MHRC's national population polling initiative), this report highlights how extended screen use and negative online experiences are associated with poorer mental health among youth aged 16–24, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and suicidal ideation.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth report the longest screen time and highest social media use of any age group, and also the most severe mental health symptoms.

- Those spending 7+ hours on personal screen time are significantly more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

- Experiences of cybervictimization have adverse effects on mental health indicators. For example, suicidal ideation increased from 10% of the national sample to 31% in those who report having experienced cybervictimization. Longer personal screen times are also related to more reports of cybervictimization.

- Youth who use platforms like TikTok and Snapchat report higher rates of suicidal ideation than the national average.

- Resilience and strong social connections help buffer the mental health impacts of screen time and cyberbullying.

IMPACT OF EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME

- Excessive screen time impacts kids, pre-teens, and teens physically through obesity, sleep disruption, eye strain, and poor posture, while mentally, it is linked to anxiety, depression, loneliness, difficulty with emotional regulation, impaired academics, and reduced social skills, as it displaces physical activity and face-to-face interaction crucial for healthy development across all ages, with teens facing specific risks from social media content.

PHYSICAL IMPACTS

- **Weight Gain:** More screen time often means less physical activity, increasing risks for overweight/obesity.
- **Sleep Problems:** Blue light and stimulating content disrupt melatonin production, leading to difficulty falling asleep and poor sleep quality, affecting mood and focus.
- **Vision & Pain:** Prolonged use causes eye strain (dry eyes, headaches) and musculoskeletal issues (neck/back pain) from poor posture.
- **Reduced Activity:** Less time for outdoor play and exercise.

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL IMPACTS

- **Anxiety & Depression:** Higher screen use correlates with increased depressive symptoms and anxiety, potentially from social comparison, cyberbullying, or displacement of protective activities.
- **Social-Emotional Deficits:** Decreased ability to read emotional cues and develop empathy, especially in younger children, due to less in-person interaction.
- **Behavioral Issues:** Can lead to aggression, impulsivity, difficulty concentrating, and emotional outbursts.
- **Poor Self-Image:** Exposure to unrealistic portrayals can harm body image.

AGE-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- **Younger Kids:** Screen time can interfere with language development and crucial early social-emotional learning.
- **Pre-Teens:** Increased risk for behavioral problems and academic struggles as habits solidify.
- **Teens:** Higher risk of problematic social media use, isolation, poor sleep, anxiety, and depression; content exposure (e.g., doomscrolling, unrealistic images) is a major factor.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS & MANAGEMENT

- Limit Time: Aim for 2 hours or less of recreational screen time daily.
- No Screens Before Bed: At least one hour before sleep.
- No Screens During Meals/Homework: Creates boundaries.
- Model Good Behavior: Parents should set an example.
- Encourage Alternatives: Promote physical activity, reading, family time, and outdoor play.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON KIDS AND YOUTH

Source: https://health.clevelandclinic.org/dangers-of-social-media-for-youth

- Too much screen time and unrealistic expectations and perceptions and can lead to an increased risk of anxiety and depression
- Spending time on social media has become almost a way of life for most adults — scrolling through videos of cuddly cats and wacky dances for hours a day.
- But is it healthy for your children to have the same habits? And how do you know if they're being safe on social media? Is social media good or bad?
- Most social media apps require users to be at least 13 years old. But according to the U.S. Surgeon General, nearly 40% of children 8 to 12 years old and 95% of children 13 to 17 years old use social media apps.
- In fact, the U.S. Surgeon General released an advisory on how social media affects children and teenager's mental health. One scary statistic? Teens who spend more than three hours a day on social media double their risk of depression and anxiety.
- If your child is currently on social media or if they've been asking to join, it's important to talk to them about what social media is, what rules you have for it and how it doesn't always show an accurate picture of someone's life.
- "Social media makes it easy to compare oneself to another," says child psychologist Kate Eshleman, PsyD. "Most people put on social media what they want you to see. And by using social media, all of us have the ability to access endless information anytime we want to, and that can be very hard for kids."
- Dr. Eshleman discusses the negative effects of social media and — if you're allowing them to use it — how to talk to your kids about how to stay safe, not overdo it and not take a lot of what they see on there too seriously.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- It can be overwhelming to think about all the negative ways your child may be affected by using social media.
- While experts are just beginning to understand social media's impact on children, one study shows that children younger than 11 years old who use Instagram and Snapchat are more likely to have problematic digital behaviors like having online-only friends and visiting sites parents would disapprove of, as well as a greater chance of taking part in online harassment.
- And it's not so easy to give up or limit your child's time on social media. According to a national survey in the United States, 33% of girls 11 to 15 years old feel addicted to social media and more than half of teens say it would be hard to give up social media. The fear of missing out, or FOMO, is real.
- So, why can social media be so bad?

BODY IMAGE CONCERNS

- Too much time on social media apps can lead to an increase in body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and low self-esteem. While this is particularly concerning for teen girls, reports show that 46% of teens 13 to 17 years old said social media made them feel worse about their bodies.
- "It's important to realize that with high-tech phones and various apps, it's much easier to snap 'the perfect picture,' which is likely not a true representation of someone's appearance," says Dr. Eshleman.
- "However, we all, and especially young people, look at these pictures and admire the beauty. This results in likely comparing oneself to an artificial image, and distress can result if we feel we don't measure up."

CYBERBULLYING

- We're all familiar with bullying — the kind that might happen on the school playground — but cyberbullying, which happens through technology, the internet and social media to harass, threaten or embarrass someone, is just as common.
- Harmful language, images and videos are prevalent, with 64% of teens reporting they're often or sometimes exposed to hate-based content.
- "The challenge to cyberbullying is that it's always there, making it much harder to walk away from the negative interactions," explains Dr. Eshleman. "It can also be spread much further, much more rapidly, resulting in negative attention being seen and heard far beyond one's close social circle."

ONLINE PREDATORS

- Unfortunately, there are people on social media who target children and teens whether to sexually exploit them, financially extort them or sell them illicitly manufactured drugs. It can be challenging for children and teens to know what to share and what not to share online.
- Another alarming stat? Nearly 6 out of 10 teen girls say they've been contacted through social media platforms by a stranger in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- "As a parent, it feels nearly impossible to be aware of and manage all of this. A good place to start is communicating with your children about these potential dangers, letting them know what to be aware of and caution them not to share any information with those they don't personally know," advises Dr. Eshleman.
- "It's also important to work to create a safe space for communication, allowing children to come to parents should questions or concerns arise."

ONLINE GROOMING AND LURING

Online grooming and luring are serious crimes where individuals use the internet to build trust with minors for the purpose of sexual exploitation. These activities are a growing problem, with reports of online luring in Canada increasing significantly in recent years.

- **Online Grooming** is a process where a predator develops an emotional connection and trust with a child or teen, often over an extended period, to manipulate them into a sexual encounter, either online or in person.

- **Online Luring** is the act of using technology (social media, gaming sites, chat rooms, etc.) to communicate with a minor with the intent of committing a sexual offense against them. Luring is an offense under the Canadian Criminal Code, even if no in-person meeting occurs.

Predators employ various manipulative strategies to gain a victim's trust and compliance:

- **Falsely identifying themselves** as a peer, friend of a friend, or someone a similar age to eliminate the "stranger danger" perception.

- **Giving excessive compliments or gifts**, such as digital game items, new phones, or money, to make the victim feel special.

- **Building trust** by discussing shared interests, listening to problems, and offering support.

- **Isolating the victim** by creating an "us versus them" mentality, convincing them their parents don't understand them or are too strict.

- **Normalizing sexual behavior** by sending inappropriate pictures or videos and encouraging the victim to do the same.

- **Using threats and blackmail (sextortion)** if the victim is reluctant to comply, threatening to share private images with family and friends.

CATFISHING

- **Fake Persona:** Online **catfishing** is the act of using a fake online identity to form a relationship with a victim
- **Deception:** The goal is to manipulate someone into a relationship (romantic or otherwise) for personal gain, like cash, sex, or emotional gratification.
- **Common Platforms:** It is prevalent on dating sites, social media (Facebook, Instagram), and gaming platforms.

HOW DOES CATFISHING RELATE TO CYBERBULLYING?

- **Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullies use repeated attempts to embarrass, humiliate, or harm someone using online resources.
- **Catfishing**: Catfishing is a form of cyberbullying because the target is harmed as the catfisher plays games with their mind.
    - **Revenge:** Some catfishers seek revenge on the person they are impersonating. They use the person's name and face and create an online identity. Then they say or do things online that make the person look bad—or even get involved in illegal activity in the target's name.
    - **Harassing their target:** When someone has been trying to stalk, bother, or pursue someone online, the target often blocks the aggressor on one or more social media platforms. When this happens, the attacker may use catfishing to continue their pursuits.
        - Even though the victim does not know who they are interacting with, the catfisher, once accepted as a friend or follower, is still able to see the target's posts and pictures.
        - In this way, they can keep tabs on what they are doing, when, and with whom.

HOW DOES CATFISHING RELATE TO ONLINE SEXTORTION?

The process typically follows these steps:

- **Fake Identity:** A perpetrator creates a convincing fake profile on social media, gaming apps, or dating sites, often pretending to be an attractive person of similar age to the victim. They use stolen or AI-generated photos and often have few friends/followers.
- **Building Trust:** The "catfish" develops a false sense of trust and an emotional connection quickly, using flattery and shared interests. They may use "love bombing" tactics and often make excuses for not meeting in person or using a live webcam.
- **Obtaining Content:** Once trust is established, the perpetrator pressures the victim into sending nude or explicit photos/videos of themselves, sometimes sending a fake explicit image first to encourage reciprocity. They may also secretly record the victim during video calls.
- **Sextortion:** The perpetrator then threatens to release the images or videos publicly to friends, family, or employers unless the victim complies with demands, which can include sending money (via gift cards, wire transfers, or cryptocurrency), more images, or engaging in further sexual acts.

SOCIAL ENGINEERING

- Social engineering is a way cyber criminals trick people to access sensitive information. It uses psychological manipulation to trick users into making security mistakes or giving away sensitive information.
- It is used to access personal information, steal money and spread malware. Cyber criminals pretend to be people and organizations the victim is familiar with to try to trick them into offering up sensitive information or clicking on a malicious link. They use information they've found online to target their victims in a very personal way.
- Different social engineering tactics use different techniques. But they often all have somethings in common. Social engineering scams usually:
  - claim to be from someone you know or trust
  - create a sense of fear or urgency
  - use familiar details to seem credible
- **Phising** involves tricking victims with a message that appears to be from a trusted source. i.e., bank, Revenue Canada, Amazon
  - Watch out for:
    - emails from your "boss" asking you to reply urgently
    - unexpected issues with online accounts
    - requests for sensitive information, like passwords or credit card numbers
- **Smishing** is phishing through SMS or text messages. Cyber criminals send texts pretending to be someone else to steal your information. Smishing scams are often harder to detect.
  - Watch out for:
    - texts from a family member or friend asking for money
    - messages that ask you to click on a link
    - warnings that require immediate action to avoid consequences
- **Vishing,** or voice phishing, is a phishing attack that happens over the phone. Cyber criminals, known as "vishers" when vishing, call you pretending to be someone they're not. Government departments, like the Canada Revenue Agency are often impersonated with this tactic, threatening legal action if the recipient doesn't send money.
  - Watch out for:
    - calls from a familiar individual or organization asking for personal or financial details
    - phone calls that create a sense of urgency
    - sudden demands for payment

HOW SOCIAL ENGINEERING IS CONDUCTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Cybercriminals use social media to gather information about their targets and craft convincing scams.
- Social engineering attacks happen in one or more steps.

- A perpetrator first investigates the intended victim to gather necessary background information, such as potential points of entry and weak security protocols, needed to proceed with the attack.
- Then, the attacker moves to gain the victim's trust and provide stimuli for subsequent actions that break security practices, such as revealing sensitive information or granting access to critical resources.
- What makes social engineering especially dangerous is that it relies on human error, rather than vulnerabilities in software and operating systems.
- Mistakes made by legitimate users are much less predictable, making them harder to identify and thwart than a malware-based intrusion.

OVERSHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- You may have heard that Facebook have the ability to create a virtual profile of us simply by keeping track of the things we do, like and say when using their social platform. Although not in as much depth, cyber criminals can do the same.
- Even details such as where you have been or an upcoming work trip can have any effect on social engineering.

SOME OF THE MORE DANGEROUS SOCIAL MEDIA APPS

https://www.purevpn.com/ca/blog/dangerous-social-media-apps/

When we talk about kids and digital threats, we discuss issues such as cyberbullying, cyberstalking, catfishing, online sexual harassment, etc. As parents, it is our job to protect our kids from online predators, harassers, stalkers, and every other kind of creep that could harm not just the privacy of our kids but also their mental health and ultimately their lives

- The digital age has exposed children, tweens, and teens to all kinds of threats on the web thanks to the ease of smartphone access. As smart devices' adaptability increases, little knowledge is conveyed to kids regarding the dangers on the internet.
- As more and more kids connect to the internet, the chances of cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and social engineering attacks have significantly increased over the years. This is why awareness regarding cybersecurity is essential for people of all ages to stay secure on the web.
- Parenting in the 21st century is way more demanding than it was ever before, and it is all due to the double-edged sword, known as technology. We say double-edged because technology has helped parents simplify many parenting tasks, for instance keeping an eye on their kids' whereabouts, restricting them from accessing certain content, etc.
- However, some technological advancements are proving to be quite a dangerous hassle for parents since they can effectively expose the privacy of the younger generation. Topping the list is the easy accessibility to smart devices and applications, which are exposing kids to growing online threats.

WHERE DO WE START

- We can start by talking to our kids about the perils of using some social media apps that are widely used by thousands and even millions of users, but they can become dangerous if not used with care.

BE AWARE OF DANGEROUS SOCIAL MEDIA APPS

- When we say dangerous, worst or unsafe social media apps, we don't mean that the app itself is dangerous. What we mean is that the abuse of these apps by people with hidden, deadly motives.
- Moreover, while the culprit who abuses the app to harass a person is to be blamed and punished for all the right reasons, as parents, it is our responsibility to teach our kids to give anyone the opportunity to harass them.
- As Aesop rightly said, "We often give our enemies the means for our own destruction."
- By abusing the social media app, an individual may hack into your kids' device and extract personal information. To a parent's worst nightmare, he may exploit the information to stalk your child online, make him/her a target of cyberbullying, sexual harassment, unethical social engineering, etc.
- In fact, it will take just a glance for you to discover thousands of cases that are linked to the abusive use of social media applications. Take for instance the suicide case of Amanda Todd, a teenager from British Columbia. The teenager took a risk while video chatting with a stranger. The culprit then used that opportunity to blackmail her and even publicized her risqué images, which ultimately became the reason for cyberbullying and eventually her death by suicide.

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIFIC SOCIAL MEDIA APPS

DANGEROUS VIRAL TRENDS

- Numerous TikTok trends have proven to be highly dangerous, leading to severe injuries, hospitalizations, and even death.
- These challenges often involve self-harm, ingesting toxic substances, reckless driving, or physical assaults on others.
- Parents, educators, and users should be aware that numerous TikTok trends have proven to be highly dangerous, leading to severe injuries, hospitalizations, and even death.
- "Kids don't have the cognitive and executive functioning to think through harmful situations and why those might be a bad idea," says Dr. Eshleman. "So, sometimes they're placing themselves in physical risk."

EXAMPLES OF DANGEROUS VIRAL CHALLENGS

- What drives someone to eat laundry detergent or cook chicken in cold medicine? Maybe it's the dopamine hit from going viral, or just plain old FOMO. Whatever the motivation, the participants in these challenges clearly weren't thinking about the emergency room visit that might follow their 15 seconds of fame.

BENADRYL CHALLENGE

- The latest trend via Tik Tok is the Benadryl Challenge. Users have mentioned that taking an excessive amount of Benadryl at one time can allow for you to get high and hallucinate. Last month, a 15-year-old teen from Oklahoma, allegedly overdosed on the drug.
- A director from the Oklahoma Center for Poison and Drug Information said that the dose that teens are using to hallucinate is very close to the dose that can be potentially life-threatening.
- Earlier this summer, three teens were hospitalized after overdosing on Benadryl tablets.

ELECTRICAL OUTLET CHALLENGE

- Another recent Tik Tok trend has been the electrical "outlet challenge" that arose earlier this year. This challenge has led to electrical system damage and fires. The outlet challenge involves placing a cell phone charger to be partially plugged in while causing a fuse with a penny. It is important that teens are aware that they could potentially be electrocuted and cause a fire that they cannot control.

PLANKING

- Remember when lying face-down like a board seemed harmless? At first, planking was just goofy fun. People would snap photos lying rigid across park benches or shopping carts. But

as with most viral trends, the stakes kept rising. Soon, thrill-seekers were planking on balcony railings, moving vehicles, and rooftops.
- Emergency departments reported several severe injuries from "extreme planking" attempts, including spinal fractures and traumatic brain injuries from falls. The challenge might seem dated now, but copycat versions still pop up on platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels.

THE HOT PEPPER CHALLENGE

- This challenge keeps reinventing itself with increasingly potent peppers: Carolina Reapers, Pepper X, and whatever nightmare botanists cook up next. Sure, we've always dared each other to try spicy foods, but there's a massive difference between adding heat to your tacos and chomping down on a pepper that measures over 2 million Scoville units.
- Eating these super-hot peppers straight can trigger more than just tears and regret. Medical professionals have documented cases of esophageal tears, severe allergic reactions, and something called "reversible cerebral vasoconstriction syndrome" or thunderclap headaches. Basically, your blood vessels spasm so violently it mimics a stroke. In September 2023, a Massachusetts teen died after participating in the "One Chip Challenge," which involved eating a single tortilla chip dusted with Carolina Reaper and Naga Viper peppers. The manufacturer pulled the product from shelves shortly after.
- Safety Tip: Thunderclap headaches strike suddenly and reach their peak within around 60 seconds. They can be a sign of a potentially life-threatening condition.

SUNBURN ART

- Want a temporary tattoo that could permanently damage your skin? That's essentially what sunburn art delivers. This trend involves creating patterns on your skin using stencils, sunscreen designs, or strategically placed objects, then deliberately getting burned to reveal the "art." Dermatologists continue to warn that this practice significantly increases melanoma risk – and the statistics back them up.
- The Skin Cancer Foundation says that repeated sunburns raise your lifetime risk of developing melanoma. Plus, with skin cancer rates rising among younger adults, this is one art form that's definitely not worth the Instagram likes.

NYQUIL CHICKEN

- Here's a challenge that's obviously dangerous. The Nyquil chicken challenge began circulating on social media in 2022, and even the pictures should give you pause. Chicken breasts drenched in an aqua-colored liquid don't look appetizing, and it turns out inedible food is the least of the dangers associated with this dare. When you boil a liquid medication, you remove excess water, and that increases the medication's intensity.

- The active ingredients in Nyquil — acetaminophen, dextromethorphan, and doxylamine — can be incredibly dangerous in high dosages. In fact, even if you don't eat the chicken, you're at risk from breathing the fumes as you're cooking it.

CINNAMON CHALLENGE

- This one took off partly because it seemed like a hilarious joke to play on friends and family. Swallowing a spoonful of cinnamon sounds easy enough. After all, we love cinnamon when it comes in roll form. The thing is, we typically eat cinnamon mixed with sugar. Straight cinnamon is far more difficult to eat. Among other things, it dries out the mouth, making it difficult for you to swallow. The goal is to catch the eater by surprise, which is supposed to be funny, and as long as everything goes to plan, it is admittedly pretty hilarious. The problem is that cinnamon is such a fine substance that it's really easy to breathe in the particles, especially when you're gagging, and cinnamon can do significant damage to the lungs. Best to stick to the rolls.

BIRD BOX CHALLENGE

- The film "Bird Box" is based on an interesting enough concept. No spoilers, but characters in the film must learn to navigate the world while wearing blindfolds. That idea wound up sparking a real-world online challenge. It's not hard to predict the results. Walking blindfolded into traffic is never a good idea.
- Proponents of the challenge have argued that it's a way to empathize with the blind. Even this turns out to be a sketchy justification, though. Studies have shown that the bird box challenge can actually make participants more insensitive to the problems the blind face.

THE BLACKOUT CHALLENGE

- This challenge – which involves intentionally cutting off oxygen until you pass out – has been cycling through different names and platforms for years. Whether it's called the "choking game" or "pass-out challenge," the mechanics and dangers remain the same.
- The CDC has been tracking this dangerous behavior since before social media existed, but platforms like TikTok have given it new life among younger users. Depriving your brain of oxygen, even briefly, can cause permanent damage. We're talking seizures, brain injury, and death. In 2022, multiple families filed lawsuits against social media companies after children died attempting this challenge, highlighting how algorithms can amplify dangerous content to vulnerable users.
- If you're a parent, this is definitely one to discuss with your kids. They need to understand that "passing out" isn't a harmless prank – it's your brain's emergency response to oxygen deprivation.

BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE

- This isn't just a challenge – it's a manipulative scheme that targets vulnerable teens through a 50-day program of escalating tasks. What starts with seemingly innocent activities like watching horror movies gradually morphs into self-harm and worse. While the original challenge peaked around 2016 to 2017, copycat versions continue to surface on messaging apps and gaming platforms.
- In 2023, several countries issued fresh warnings about similar "suicide games" targeting young people through Discord and other chat services.
- Parents should watch for warning signs like secretive online behavior, unexplained injuries, or dramatic mood changes.

TIDE PODS

- Here's another one that's been a particular problem among kids. It's also another one that's based almost entirely on misinformation. Tide PODS look pretty cool, and they have the same bright colors you typically find in popular candies. A blue-and-white swirl could easily be some sort of blue raspberry and cream concoction if you bought it at the checkout of your local grocery. Sounds delicious. You can see why kids might be susceptible to peer pressure to try eating a Tide POD. This one seems to have died down following some intense media scrutiny, but for a while, it was among the most dangerous dares out there.

SWATTING

- Unlike other challenges that harm the participants, swatting weaponizes law enforcement against innocent victims. This "prank" involves making false emergency calls to send SWAT teams to someone's address. Streamers, gamers, or celebrities whose locations have been leaked online are the most common victims.
- The FBI now treats swatting as a serious federal crime, and for good reason. These fake calls waste emergency resources and put everyone involved in danger – the victims, the officers, and any bystanders. Several high-profile cases have resulted in multi-year prison sentences, proving that swatting isn't just a prank; it's a felony that can ruin lives, including your own.

TIKTOK CHALLENGE INVOLVING SCHOOL ISSUED CHROMEBOOKS CAUSING A FIRE HAZARD

- There is a growing concern over a TikTok trend where students are posing a risk of starting fires or getting hurt with a new challenge encouraging students to insert metal or other conductive objects (such as paperclips, pushpins, aluminum foil, and mechanical pencils) into the keys or ports of their school-issued Chromebooks in an attempt to start a fire.
- This behavior is very dangerous: it can cause a fire and release toxic vapors, putting the student and others at serious risk

- Another study talks about how children who use TikTok are developing tics and having tic-like attacks. They're experiencing a movement disorder brought on by stress and anxiety — presumably made worse by the pandemic and teens increased social media consumption.
- Changes in their daily behavior
  - In addition to problematic digital behaviors, there may be changes in children's daily behavior at home, such as:
    - Increased irritability.
    - Increased anxiety.
    - Increased depression.
    - Increased sleep issues.
    - Lack of self-esteem.
    - Lack of focus and concentration.
- "If kids are being asked to get off social media and do their homework, or any unpreferred task, then parents might see increased periods of irritability or frustration directed towards parents," notes Dr. Eshleman. "They're being asked to do something they don't want to do and stop doing something they enjoy. Further, there is evidence to show that extended screen time alone negatively impacts mood."

OTHER DANGERS

ONLINE YOUTH RADICALIZATION GROUPS

- Online youth radicalization in 2026 is characterized by the emergence of decentralized "com" (community) networks that blend violent extremism with other forms of online harm.
- Violent extremist groups have often been engaged in activities involving the radicalisation of young people (those under 25 years) towards violent extremism. Regardless of their beliefs, young people may become particularly vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment by violent extremist and terrorist groups.

CURRENT HIGH-RISK ONLINE NETWORKS

"THE COM" (COMMUNITY NETWORKS):

- A primary threat identified by the National Crime Agency (NCA) and RCMP in late 2025 and early 2026. These networks target children as young as eight, using platforms like Discord and Telegram to groom youth through a "salad bar" of ideologies.

764 (HAZARD 44 / CVLT):

- Officially listed by Canada as a terrorist entity in December 2025, 764 is a transnational ideologically motivated violent extremist (IMVE) network that recruits minors through gaming and social media.

TERRORGRAM COLLECTIVE:

- An extremist network operating on Telegram that facilitates the distribution of manuals for real-world violence and incites attacks through "accelerationist" propaganda.

ONLINE MISOGYNY

THE MANOSPHERE

- A growing number of men spread hateful ideas about women, trans and nonbinary folks online. Some internet communities even encourage and celebrate gender-based violence. How did we get here? Why do some men and boys get drawn into – and even seek out – extremist influencers and groups?
- Extremism watchdog organizations label these beliefs as "male supremacy." Much like white supremacy, male supremacy attracts men who feel distanced or unsettled by societal changes. Influencers provide these men with promises of support and a sense of purpose. However, they do so while denying basic rights and respect to women, trans, and nonbinary individuals. Additionally, they promote a narrow and restrictive definition of masculinity, which can negatively impact men's understanding of themselves and others.

MISOGYNIST INCELS

- The word **"incel"** is a contraction of **"involuntary celibate."** Incels are almost exclusively straight men who have been unsuccessful in finding relationships with women. Many of them discover incel forums and websites while seeking support for their feelings of sadness and alienation. From there, they are drawn into a world of despair and anger.

- Incel culture is violently antifeminist and misogynist. Incels often describe women as subhuman objects of desire who are hated and resented because – incels claim – feminism has given women power over sex and romance.

FINAL WORD

- The apps and listed above cannot be blamed in any way for how they are used, after all, a user needs to be smarter than an app. Plus, asking your kids to stop using any app isn't the ideal way to stop them from getting exposed to online threats. After all, from one way to another, they may try to find any other app and start using it.

- So, educating them about how to maintain online privacy can be a good option too.

- The best way is to stay cautious of the dangers of the apps your kids are using and educate them on their hazards. Plus, you may also use encryption tools like a VPN service to hide your kids' location and paralyze hackers from getting access to their location and personal information.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on these and other topics related to keeping children safe online, please visit the websites for these organizations.

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR CHILD PROTECTION (C3P);

- C3P is a Canadian registered charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of all children. More specifically, its goal is to reduce the victimization (sexual abuse and exploitation) of children by providing programs and services to the Canadian public.

- The organization is supported by the Government of Canada, along with the provincial/territorial governments of Manitoba, New Brunswick, and the Yukon.

- C3P offers various prevention and intervention services to the Canadian public; one of its core services is **Cybertip.ca**, Canada's official tip-line for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children.

PROTECT KIDS ONLINE

- Protect Kids Online is operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.
- ProtectKidsOnline.ca is designed to assist parents/guardians in protecting their children on the Internet and reducing their risk of victimization.

CRISIS AND HELP LINES

9-1-1 IMMEDIATE DANGER

- **Call 9-1-1** if you or a family member is in immediate risk or danger.

9-8-8 SUICIDE CRISIS HELPLINE

- **Call or text 9-8-8** if you or someone you know is thinking of suicide.

CYBERTIP.CA

- Canada's national tipline that serves as a central hub for the public to report illegal online activities and materials involving minors (youth).
    - Online Reporting: **https://cybertip.ca/en/report/**
    - Phone: Call the toll-free tipline at **1-800-532-9135.**

NEEDHELPNOW.CA

- Offers guidance for youth (under 18) whose intimate images or videos have been shared without consent.

KIDS HELP PHONE

- Provides 24/7 confidential support for youth via
    - Phone **(1-800-668-6868)**
    - Text **(text CONNECT to 686868)**