

# Parents & Professionals

## List of Social Media Harms Impacting Minors

Contributing Members: Joann Bogard, Lisa Honold, Amy Neville, Dawn Wible, Sharon Winkler, Maree Hampton, Liana Vincent, Bridgette Norring, Meghan Stuhmer, Judy Rogg, Liz Willers, Neveen Radwan

This document is the work of the Online Harms Prevention work group at *The Screen Time Action Network at Fairplay*. Our perspective is unique because we are parents and professionals, many of whom have lost children to online harms. Our mission is to educate adults and youth on online harms that occur in social media apps, hold Big Tech accountable for their defective products and advocate for national standards to keep young people safe online.

For questions, please contact the Co-Chair of the Online Harms Prevention Work Group, Dawn Wible at [dawn@talkmoretechless.com](mailto:dawn@talkmoretechless.com)

The purpose of this document is to list the multitudes of online harms affecting children and teens and recognize contributing factors, risks and effects. “Online harms” is defined as harmful business models and content (both physical and mental) found on social media platforms. The online harms listed are related to minors under the age of 18, but often are also harmful to adults.

This document has two sections:

1. In **Section One**, we list the **Universal Social Media Harms**, which are the contributing factors (conditions that contribute to the likelihood that harms will occur), and risks and effects (negative results or damage caused).
2. In **Section Two**, we list **Specific Social Media Harms**, contributing factors and risks & effects. We will not continue to list the Universal Social Media Harms for each Specific Harm.

**Section 1: Universal Social Media Harms** - Each of these applies to every specific social media harm listed in **Section 2**.



[Screen Time Action Network Online Harms Prevention Action Kit](#)

### Universal Contributing Factors

#### Health & Wellbeing:

- Allowing digital devices in bedrooms/private spaces<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>
- Exposure to violent/unhealthy content<sup>4</sup>: pro-suicide, cutting & other physical self-harm<sup>5</sup>, pro-eating disorder<sup>6</sup>, illegal drug sales<sup>7</sup>

#### Violation of Trust:

- Platforms not following their own Terms of Service (TOS) and guidelines<sup>8</sup>
- Ineffective and hard to navigate reporting systems; reported content not removed
- Reported accounts (drug dealers, CSAM) can repeatedly create new accounts
- No publicly required audits of reported safety violations by independent sources
- Lack of response to reports of dangerous challenges and other TOS violations
- Parental controls that are ineffective - [Teen Accounts, Broken Promises, How Instagram is Failing to Protect Minors](#)<sup>9</sup>
- Access to platform content without an account
- Limited and inconsistent federal and state standards and legislation for “duty of care”
- No oversight by independent sources or independent audits
- Ed Tech apps and Chromebooks
- Limited media literacy/digital citizenship education for K-12 students, parents in media literacy/digital citizenship

#### Design of Technology:

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- Persuasive design/engagement algorithms (infinite scroll/autoplay; notifications; interaction streaks; variable rewards; quantified/named popularity ("likes"); gamification)<sup>10</sup>
- Inability of users to change algorithms
- Lack of algorithm and platform transparency
- No publicly shared safety reports
- Safety issues with anonymous apps
- Algorithms that spread posts based on salacious or outrageous content, not truth or common good
- Targeted advertising to minors with inappropriate and/or illegal content
- Emoji meanings, text codes & internet slang hides intent from parents

### Universal Risks and Effects


- Depression<sup>11-16</sup>
- Anxiety<sup>17</sup>
- Isolation<sup>18</sup>
- Peer influence (virtual vs real)
- Less participation in social situations
- Unhealthy relationships
- Lower self-esteem
- Stress
- Sleep deprivation
- Excessive time online
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Reduction in quality of life
- Unhealthy diet<sup>19</sup>
- Reduced social empathy

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### Section 2: Specific Social Media Harms

TARGETING AND MANIPULATION OF MINORS		
Specific Social Media Harm	Contributing Factors	Risks & Effects
<b>Child and Adult Influencers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adolescent, underdeveloped brain being offered content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advertisers unaware that their ad revenue is funding harms online</li> <li>Negative behaviors</li> <li>Negative attitude with parents</li> <li>Marketing to minors</li> </ul>
<b>Disinformation / Misinformation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly emotional posts, many of which are inaccurate, are prioritized by many platforms' algorithmic recommendation systems</li> <li>Relying on users to verify accuracy of posts vs. platform trust &amp; safety personnel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advertisers unaware that their ad revenue is funding harms online</li> <li>Teens may refuse needed medical treatments based upon false information</li> </ul>
<b>Extremist Recruiting<sup>20-23</sup>:</b> Terrorist recruiting / gang recruiting / Nihilistic Violent Extremist (NVE) groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of accountability</li> <li>Easy access to an audience</li> <li>Vulnerability</li> <li>Loneliness/need for belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spreading terrorism and radicalization</li> <li>Manipulation by others to do injurious things to self and others</li> <li>Racial discrimination</li> <li>Echo chambers</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Privacy Protection:</b> Data mining/harvesting, trickery (using polls, etc. to gain personal info)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Location settings on apps</li> <li>Tracking (browser, touch-based microphone and camera access)</li> <li>Easy access to personal information online</li> <li>Instant gratification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identity theft or impersonation</li> <li>Trafficking</li> <li>Violation</li> <li>Targeted advertising</li> <li>Doxing: sharing addresses and personal identifiable information</li> </ul>
<b>Online Gambling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensationalized ads</li> <li>No substantial age verification</li> <li>Interactive and addictive design</li> <li>Anonymity and privacy - hiding the habit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sleep deprivation</li> <li>Addiction carried into adulthood</li> <li>Risk of financial ruin</li> <li>Habit forming</li> <li>Problematic behaviors due to stress</li> </ul>




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<p><b>Internet Gaming Addiction / Overuse</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devices in bedrooms (isolated)</li> <li>• Influencers</li> <li>• Marketing to kids</li> <li>• Built to be addictive</li> <li>• Gamification- rewards to log in every day or at a certain time leading to excessive use</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• FOMO</li> <li>• Social norm for boys</li> <li>• Online community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grooming hate groups via online games</li> <li>• Lower grades/academic achievement</li> <li>• Weaker parent-child bond and weaker sibling bond (more generally weaker relationships with both family and friends which also leads to lower resiliency)</li> <li>• Under-developed social skills and lower confidence</li> <li>• Decreased motivation for real world pursuits</li> <li>• Materialistic values</li> <li>• Sexualization / exposure to over-sexualized content (pornography was mentioned, but it goes far beyond porn - a lot of tv shows, movies and ads are hypersexualized and objectifying females)</li> <li>• Sedentary lifestyle and poorer diet (influenced by ads, which runs the online world), which contributes to obesity/metabolic disease, which have many negative health consequences</li> <li>• Dissociative disorders</li> <li>• Censorship of information that later turns out to be correct and shutting down of public debate on consequential topics</li> <li>• Creation of echo chambers</li> <li>• Dopamine hits</li> <li>• Advertisers unaware that their ad revenue is funding harms online</li> </ul>
<p><b>Online Marketing to Minors<sup>24,25</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influencers</li> <li>• Real money spent on virtual</li> <li>• Rewards (Robux)</li> <li>• Alcohol, tobacco and other age-inappropriate products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obsessive materialism</li> <li>• Encouraging children to self brand, affecting self-esteem, self worth</li> <li>• Trains children to highly value wealth and possessions vs. interpersonal relationships, spiritual values</li> </ul>


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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negatively influences children’s relationships</li> <li>• By the time a child reaches 13, online advertising firms have an average of 72 million data points about them</li> </ul>
<p><b>Persuasive and Manipulative Design<sup>26</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Platforms incentivize users to keep coming back and create opportunities to analyze user’s behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screen addiction</li> <li>• Quantified popularity (number of likes)</li> <li>• Algorithms promote posts with more "likes"</li> <li>• Dopamine rush;</li> <li>• Reduced "likes" results in decreased feelings of self-worth, which can lead to depression</li> </ul>
<p><b>Screen Addiction / Overuse<sup>27-40</sup></b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "For you" feed (also sends emails to nudge you back to the app)</li> <li>• Snap streaks</li> <li>• Unlimited time on apps</li> <li>• Easy clicks (apps on desktop)</li> <li>• Multiple devices to access internet/apps</li> <li>• Autoplay</li> <li>• Excessive app alerts/notifications on likes (quantified popularity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive screen time affecting body-weight, myopia, tech neck</li> <li>• Snap streaks create pressure to continue</li> <li>• Reduced academic performance</li> <li>• Sleep deprivation</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Changes in the young brain</li> <li>• Increased youth suicide</li> <li>• Radical changes in healthy socialization</li> </ul>


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NEGATIVE SOCIAL IMPACTS / PEER INFLUENCE ON MINORS		
Specific Social Media Harm	Contributing Factors	Risks & Effects
<p><b>Catfishing:</b> Online Impersonation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy access to profiles and personal information</li> <li>• Hard to fact check</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shame</li> <li>• Loss of money</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cyberbullying</b><sup>41-46</sup></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apps that allow anonymous profiles or anonymity</li> <li>• Devices provide constant access to bullying</li> <li>• Disappearing messages and photos</li> <li>• Lower human empathy</li> <li>• Lack of real-time moderators</li> <li>• Online harassment</li> <li>• Doxing/Sharing addresses and personal identifiable information</li> <li>• Increase in cyberbullying and "cyberflashing" (sending nudes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suicidality</li> <li>• Easy access for predators</li> <li>• Predatory behavior can develop</li> <li>• No accountability for actions</li> <li>• Bullying, harassment and stalking (including technology facilitated abuse and gender-based violence)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dangerous Social Media Challenges</b><sup>47-51</sup>: e.g. Tide Pod challenge, blackout challenge, subway surfing challenge, etc.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Algorithms</li> <li>• "Likes"</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• Unlimited sharing/viral popularity</li> <li>• Teens developmentally choose thrill seeking activities; curiosity</li> <li>• Hashtag searches that look innocent but give kids access to harmful content</li> <li>• False sense of safety after viewing many videos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self harm</li> <li>• Early exposure to violent content</li> <li>• Serious illness</li> <li>• Accidental death</li> <li>• Addictive</li> </ul>
<p><b>Eating Disorders / Body Dysmorphia / Bigorexia</b><sup>52-56</sup></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unrealistic and unattainable body images</li> <li>• Filters to change bodies and faces</li> <li>• Influencers</li> <li>• Communities that promote eating disorders, dysmorphia, unhealthy body image</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowered Self esteem</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Advertisers unaware that their ad revenue is funding harms online</li> <li>• Potential addiction to enhancement drugs</li> <li>• Extreme comparison</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and beauty industry marketing to minors?</li> <li>• Hashtag searches that look innocent but give kids access to harmful content</li> <li>• Fitness industry marketing to minors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating disorders</li> <li>• Normalization of eating disorders</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gaslighting:</b> Convincing one to believe they are wrong</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teens lack real-life experience and naively believe information from trusted others</li> <li>• Teens' immaturity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online radicalization, e.g. encouraged to join terrorist/gang/hate groups</li> <li>• Teens not obtaining needed medical care</li> <li>• Teens believing that sexual situations without consent are normal</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rumor Spreading / Reputation Slander:</b> <b>Gossip Accounts / "Spill the Tea" / Brigading<sup>57</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having phones in schools</li> <li>• Instant gratification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety for targeted individuals</li> <li>• Depression in targeted individuals</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self Harm<sup>58-67</sup>:</b> The act of purposely hurting oneself as an emotional coping mechanism</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amazon marketing self harm and suicide kits</li> <li>• Hashtag searches that look innocent but give kids access to harmful content</li> <li>• Exposure to harmful personal photos and coaching</li> <li>• "Pro" self harm groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical complications from skin cutting; burning or head banging</li> <li>• Self injuries such as skin cutting, burning, head banging, hair pulling, etc.</li> <li>• Addictive</li> </ul>
<p><b>Selling Illegal Street and Prescription Drugs on Social Media<sup>68-69</sup></b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No national policy</li> <li>• Platforms don't turn over criminal activity to local authorities</li> <li>• Disappearing messages</li> <li>• New accounts can be created for repeat offenders</li> <li>• Hashtag searches that look innocent but give kids access to harmful content</li> <li>• Emojis that adults don't understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drug addiction</li> <li>• Drug trafficker recruitment of child or teen</li> <li>• Accidental death</li> <li>• Advertisers unaware that their ad revenue is funding harms online</li> </ul>
<p><b>Suicidal Ideation Content<sup>70-79</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rabbit holes deliver more salacious content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalizes suicide over time</li> </ul>


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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continuous exposure to repeated content</li><li>• “Pro” suicide groups</li><li>• Hashtag searches that look innocent but give kids access to harmful content</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teens developmentally choose thrill seeking activities; curiosity</li></ul>
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SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MINORS		
Specific Social Media Harm	Contributing Factors	Risks & Effects
<p><b>Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) / Child Sex Exploitation</b><sup>80-85</sup></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexualization of children in society</li> <li>Trafficking</li> <li>Porn industry</li> <li>Hashtag searches that look innocent but give kids access to harmful content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSAM is spread online</li> <li>Minors receive unsolicited obscene materials</li> <li>Child sexual molestation</li> <li>Child sex trafficking</li> <li>Encouragement of children to record sexual acts and share online</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cyberflashing</b> (non-consensual)<sup>86</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Airdrop/Nearby Share turned on</li> <li>Normalization of porn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early unwanted exposure for child</li> <li>Crime for adults to receive</li> </ul>
<p><b>Human Trafficking/Grooming/Solicitation</b><sup>87-88</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pornography industry / CSAM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human traffickers contact minors through messaging, often misrepresenting who they are</li> <li>Minors offered “jobs” by traffickers</li> <li>55% of human trafficking survivors surveyed in 2018 reported that they were recruited via text, website or app</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pornography</b><sup>89</sup></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social acceptance</li> <li>Desensitization</li> <li>Easily accessible</li> <li>Sexual texting codes, emojis</li> <li>Fueled by the pornography industry, CSAM, teen porn</li> <li>"Cyberflashing" (sending nudes)</li> <li>Hashtag searches or websites that look innocent but give kids access to harmful content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normalizing sexual violence</li> <li>Negative body image, sexual objectification of others</li> <li>Mental health degradation</li> <li>Relationship and identity problems</li> <li>Aggression and objectification</li> <li>Problematic behaviors</li> <li>Physical comparison</li> <li>Pornographic content is misleading, degrading, objectifying, and often overtly violent</li> </ul>
<p><b>Revenge Porn</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer romantic relationships</li> <li>Instant gratification</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease of uploading images</li> <li>• Poor Content Moderation on platforms</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Sexting</b><sup>90-93</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalization of porn</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• False norm that “everyone is doing it”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early sexualization</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sextortion</b><sup>94-95</sup></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of embarrassing pics/nudes-blackmail material (oversharing)</li> <li>• Devices in bedrooms late at night</li> <li>• Vulnerability</li> <li>• Desensitization</li> <li>• Nudes common</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shame</li> <li>• Money spent</li> </ul>

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PLATFORMS



Specific Social Media Harm	Contributing Factors	Risks and Effects
<p><b>General &amp; Character AI apps, including “Therapist” apps</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unregulated Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Spread misinformation, harassment, extortion, cheating, dangerous communications)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suicidal ideation, manipulation</li> <li>• Reduced academic/intelligence and social skills</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nudify or Undressing Apps/Deepfake Pornography</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses Artificial Intelligence to recreate an image so that the subject is nude.</li> <li>• Many apps use open source programming, which are free to developers.</li> <li>• No federal law banning deepfake pornography of adults.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-consensual use of clothed human images</li> <li>• Many apps only modify female images</li> <li>• Advertised to be used as revenge porn</li> <li>• Difficult for law enforcement to prosecute, adding to emotional trauma of victims</li> </ul>
<p><b>Virtual Reality-Assaults/Virtual Sexual Assaults</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing use/time spent on in virtual reality applications</li> <li>• Increasing numbers of users</li> <li>• Headsets with advanced audio and eye tracking create intimate emotional connection with online avatar</li> <li>• Immersive virtual environments cause harassing behaviors to feel more realistic</li> <li>• Lack of in-application controls to prevent unwanted interactions with other users</li> <li>• Lack of privacy controls to limit interaction with other users</li> <li>• Lack of definition of what online behavior constitutes a crime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profound psychological effects similar to violent attacks in real world</li> </ul>

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### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PLATFORMS



Specific Social Media Harm	Contributing Factors	Risks and Effects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of definition of what types of evidence is needed to prove a crime occurred</li><li>• Lack of criminal statutes</li></ul>	

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