

Being a parent of a teen isn't easy, and likewise, neither is being a teen. **Teens today face a number of concerning challenges that have significant implications for their health.** Here's what parents should know about each:

1. They spend a lot of time staring at screens ...about 9 hours each day!

That's 63 hours a week, or the equivalent to a full-time job AND a part-time job. Several studies show that too much time online is linked to mental and physical problems such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep deprivation and obesity. For parents, the takeaway here is that we need to help kids detach and set healthy boundaries around phone use. That means making sure they're having in-person interactions with their friends. Also, when they are with friends or family, make sure they know the phone is off-limits.



3. They vape.

Whether they vape nicotine, THC or just flavored juices, e-cigarette aerosol is definitely NOT harmless "water vapor." According to the CDC, more than 3.6 million youth in the United States were current e-cigarette users in 2018. The Surgeon General has marked this vaping trend an "epidemic" among our youth, and has called for aggressive steps to protect our children from the risks of e-cigarettes. Our teens resort to vaping as a stress coping mechanism, or they cave under peer-pressure, while some simply enjoy the availability of flavors. It is essential that parents stay educated and not shy away from discussing harmful facts of this trend with their teens and tweens.



5. They are taking their own lives.

Of all the concerning trends that face teens today, this is by far the scariest. According to an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association, teen suicide has reached its highest level since 2000. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 11 to 18. What's led many of our young people to take their lives? There are numerous theories, from too much social media use leading to isolation to higher rates of mental illness. Some suggest that suicide deaths are being reported more openly today than in the past, so that the numbers now more accurately reflect the problem. Regardless, we have to make sure our kids have the resources and tools necessary to cope with life's stressors.

Source: health.usnews.com

2. They experience a lot of anxiety and depression.

The Journal of Abnormal Psychology finds that over the past decade the number of youth with mental health disorders has more than doubled! Many studies have found strong relationships between social media use and feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression. There's no way around it...digital connectedness does not replicate the emotional bond of real person-to-person relationships. In addition to setting healthy screen boundaries, encourage in-person interactions, sports or other exercise, social clubs, consuming print media, etc.

4. They use weed.

Although adolescent use of illicit drugs is down, marijuana use has reached its highest level in 30 years (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry). Today's marijuana is reportedly 2 to 3 times more potent than in the past due to higher levels of THC, the chemical responsible for the high it produces. The risks aren't just temporary, either. Marijuana use can have long-term effects on the developing adolescent brain resulting in cognitive impairment that can lead to learning and memory problems. Most of our youth believe a frightening myth: that smoking weed isn't that harmful. We must have real conversations with our kids about the dangers associated with marijuana use.

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