

ADVISORY

FROM THE COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

WHEREAS, on March 2, 2023, New York City (NYC) issued its plan for improving the mental health of New Yorkers — titled [*Care, Community, Action: A Mental Health Plan for NYC*](#) — which identified that NYC is facing a crisis of youth mental health and is committed to taking action on social media platforms, a contributing factor; and

WHEREAS, youth mental health in NYC has been declining for over a decade. Rates of NYC high schoolers experiencing hopelessness increased by over 42% between 2011 and 2021, and rates of suicidal ideation increased by more than 34%. According to the most recent data in 2021, 38% of NYC high schoolers felt so sad or hopeless during the past year that they stopped engaging in their usual activities. Young people who identify as Black, Latino, female or LGBTQ+ bear disproportionately high rates of experiencing hopelessness; and

WHEREAS, social media has become an increasingly ubiquitous and impactful part of the lives of NYC youth, especially with the advent of smartphones, algorithmic targeting of content and monetization of user-generated content. Data from 2021 indicate that 77% of NYC high schoolers spent three or more hours per day in front of screens on an average school day, not including time spent on schoolwork; and

WHEREAS, on May 23, 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*, which found that “the current body of evidence indicates that while social media may have benefits for some children and adolescents, there are ample indicators that social media can also have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. At this time, we do not yet have enough evidence to determine if social media is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents”; and

WHEREAS, professional and scholarly societies have similarly issued warnings of the negative mental health impacts of social media on youth, including the American Academy of Pediatrics’ (AAP) policy statement on [*Media Use in School-Aged Children and Adolescents*](#) and the American Psychological Association’s [*Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence*](#); and

WHEREAS, on June 8, 2023, NYC hosted a convening titled *New York City's Role in the National Crisis of Social Media and Youth Mental Health* in which over 150 participants from government, academia, advocacy, health care, community services, and youth and families shared their experiences and their solutions for mitigating the negative impact of social media on youth mental health. NYC youth attested that social media was negatively impacting their self-esteem, social relationships and ability to manage their time effectively, and asked for more support; and

WHEREAS, there are now science-backed resources for youth, caregivers, health care providers, educators and school staff, community-based organizations, and technologists that can be used to promote youth mental health with respect to use of social media. In particular, the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration funded the [AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#) to provide evidence-based tools and guidance. Additional efforts are needed to ensure that these resources reach New Yorkers in ways that are culturally and linguistically responsive, with particular attention to reaching disproportionately impacted communities, such as LGBTQ+ youth.

THEREFORE, YOU ARE HEREBY PROVIDED NOTICE THAT:

1. Adults who interact with children and youth, including caregivers, health care providers, educators and school staff, community-based organizations, and youth development staff, should take opportunities to promote use of social media in a manner that is protective of youth mental health. This includes:
 - a. Implementing tech-free times and places in relevant settings that encourage in-person connection;
 - b. Discussing social media use in an open-minded way with children and youth, and providing support when they identify concerns; and
 - c. Modeling healthy social media use, including sharing use practices and how to be thoughtful with use.
2. Adults who interact with children and youth are encouraged to familiarize themselves with and implement as appropriate the content from NYC Public Schools' approved digital citizenship curricula for the most relevant development stage, available at bit.ly/schools-digital-citizenship. When sharing content from these resources, adults should ensure that the material is delivered in a way that is culturally and linguistically responsive.
3. Parents and Caregivers are encouraged to create a Family Media Plan, as supported by the AAP, with their children to discuss social media use and set shared goals that promote mental health. Family Media Planning tools are available at bit.ly/AAP-media-plan.
4. Brains develop throughout childhood, and there is no safe age established yet for children to use smartphones and social media platforms. The AAP offers a resource at bit.ly/first-phone-child to support parents and caregivers in making decisions about when to give children their first phone. In navigating these decisions:
 - a. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to delay giving children access to a smartphone, or similar device that can access social media, until at least age 14, and then reassess based on the current evidence of harms and the child's strengths and needs.
 - b. When children begin to travel more independently in NYC, caregivers are encouraged to start them with a phone that does not have the ability to access social media.
5. Health care providers are encouraged to discuss social media and mental health with young people and their families, including providing evidence-based guidance and supporting the implementation of Family Media Plans, both during well-visits and with youth reporting mental health concerns.
6. Young people are encouraged to develop healthy habits around social media use, which may include:

- a. Sharing concerns related to social media and mental health with adults, including when facing threatening situations;
 - b. Limiting social media use to set time frames;
 - c. Monitoring emotions during social media use, and making a plan to focus social media use on those activities that bring positive emotions, such as communicating with friends or participating in communities with shared interests; and
 - d. Changing settings on social media, such as turning off notifications, increasing privacy settings or following accounts that bring feelings of joy, hope and connection.
7. Technologists, investors and others that interact with social media companies should advocate for social media companies to promote safer design of the platforms.
 8. Federal and state policymakers should consider building on existing legislative proposals to further protect children and youth from predatory practices by social media companies.
 9. All New Yorkers should advocate to hold social media companies accountable and advance reform that protects youth from harmful and predatory practices.

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