

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on the Risks of Adolescents' Online Activity

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2018

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ISSUE:

In recent years, adolescents have become increasingly invested in social media and other online activities, where they frequently share copious personal information online. Communicating and sharing personal information online exposes adolescents to many risks including cyberbullying, legal consequences from sexting, and exposure to online predators. Furthermore, the increase in online activity and online bullying has become a looming safety concern in this population. Negative online exposure can have detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of teenagers causing depression, anxiety, increased suicidal thoughts, and even reports of completed teen suicide in some cases. Online activity also has widespread legal ramifications in the adolescent population. With insufficient legal protection for adolescents posting online, the role of protecting teens from the risks of their own immature online decision-making largely falls to parents who are often unaware and/or uneducated about the risks of their children's online activity.

POSITION:

It is the position of the American Psychiatric Association that online activity is both an important phenomenon and one that has significant risks, to which adolescents are particularly vulnerable, and should be considered in the treatment of individuals. Online activity is also of broader public health concern, and psychiatrists can play a role in community efforts to promote safe engagement with social media and other online activities.

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