



A Dangerous Mix... Social Media, Teens & Drugs

Right or wrong, good or bad, it seems as though during the teen years, things like friend cliques, peer pressure and bullying have always been a part of growing up for each generation. And while these things still hold true for today's teens, they also find themselves navigating a completely new obstacle their parents and grandparents didn't have to navigate: social media.

We know there is an upside to social media apps as they allow all of us, as well as teens, to share and stay connected with friends and family. This is especially true when busy schedules and distance make staying in touch much more difficult.

Unfortunately, just as there are a lot of upsides to social media, there are also very real downsides to it as well. And because social media/the digital world were not part of today's parents' and grandparents' school experiences, many find themselves struggling at times to help their kids safely navigate through it.

For instance, most parents and grandparents learned about "stranger danger", what it looked like and what to do when approached by someone in person and were able to pass that onto their own kids. However, understanding and recognizing "stranger danger" in the digital world has become much more complex and, in many ways, even more dangerous.

Luckily, through time and education, we all have come to recognize some of the serious dangers of being online. Because of this, most kids now learn about stranger danger in the online world as well as in the "real world" both at home and school.

Beyond "stranger danger", we also have learned and seen studies that show for some, especially teens, social media is directly correlated to unhealthy emotional and mental health. Kids, especially teens, constantly and continually compare themselves and their lives to others by what they see on social media sites. For most of us, the adolescent and teen years were indeed awkward years, as acne and hormonal and body changes made sure of that. Just like teens of today, we,

too, would compare ourselves to our friends and other peers at school. However, just like "stranger danger," social media has really complicated and intensified an already complicated and intense time in a teen's life.

Some kids find themselves constantly looking at and checking posts on social media sites to make sure they didn't miss anything "important". They then find themselves comparing their family life, friendships, activities and self-image to others they see online, whether they know them or not. This can, and has led to, an increase of kids experiencing anxiety, feeling inadequate and/or lonely, isolated and even clinically depressed.

And just when we start to feel educated about social media dangers and feel somewhat comfortable about addressing a concerning topic related to it, another one rears its ugly head as it creeps out from the digital world.

These days, we find ourselves, once again, behind the curve, with yet another problematic online phenomenon: The buying and selling of drugs. This phenomenon often intertwines with the online stranger danger element and the growing concern about the mental well-being of kids.

While substance use and experimentation among teens is not a new happening, the easy access and availability of these substances online is quite eye opening and extremely concerning. Gone are the days where kids needed an older sibling or an older friend to help them access alcohol or other drugs. These days, kids buy and sell drugs online through social media sites and apps.

Quite literally at a push of a button and a click or two, kids have access to most any drug imaginable. The relative ease of ordering from headshops or self-described "pharmacies" online produces a false sense of security that what they are buying is safe.

While teens do order from headshops or self-described "pharmacies" online, they are even far more likely to buy and even sell from and to other kids on social media sites. Snapchat, Tik Tok, Instagram and You-Tube are four of the most popular social media sites and apps kids use, whereas, most adults tend to be on Facebook.

All of these apps, including Facebook, can unintentionally lead to the drug-world culture. However, one app appears to be utilized more often when it comes to buying and selling drugs for teens. That app is Snapchat.

Snapchat is the most popular apps kids use. Since Snapchat is set up to automatically disappear once it is viewed, this makes it easy to conceal/hide communications about buying and selling of drugs. And if a disappearing post wasn't enough, Snapchat also has an app function that allows someone to turn on their notification function so they know when and who took a screenshot of a

post. Just knowing this function exists is a huge deterrent to teens taking a screen shot of drug related posts and reporting them.

However, even when parents use parental controls and monitor apps, they often overlook drug referenced posts. Kids, in general, use emojis and pictures or acronyms to communicate online and communicating about drugs is no different.

Below are two links on emojis and acronyms and what they mean within the drug world.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/550088796/DEA-Emoji-Drug-Decoder>

<https://www.joe.co.uk › life › is-your-teen-texting-abou..>

Luckily, social media platforms like Snapchat are beginning to update and improve their proactive detection capabilities to remove, block, and/or reject posts related to drug dealings from its platform. They are also implementing new tools and educational resources in an effort to help address the devastating impact of drug overdose and the fentanyl crisis.

According to CBS News, Snapchat has stated they are "determined to do their part to eradicate drug sales." Instagram said it will "continue making improvements" to keep young people safe. And the latest quarterly Transparency Report shows Tik-Tok has removed around 96% of drug-related videos within 24 hours. All three companies said they are using technology to proactively remove this content.

The big question is, what can parents do? Simply talk with your kids about drugs. Have an open and honest conversation about the dangers of drugs. Secondly, make it a priority to know which apps your kids use and learn how to use them and what different emojis and acronyms represent.

For more information about teens and drug use and abuse, please contact or visit SCIP online at www.scipnebraska.com

<https://www.nextgenerationvillage.com › drugs › related>

<https://www.kolmac.com › how-does-social-media-affe...>

<https://www.addictioncenter.com › community › social-...>

<https://www.banyantreatmentcenter.com › 2020/06/04>

<https://techcrunch.com/2021/10/07/snapchat-is-launching-new-tools-to-crack-down-on-illicit-drug-sales-on-its-platform/>

<https://www.wdbj7.com/2021/02/24/early-years-snapchat-and-other-social-media-being-used-by-drug-dealers-to-target-kids/>