

## Is there a link between social media and the teen suicide rate?

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**Lexington Park, MD-** Last March, the Maryland Senate unanimously passed [Grace's Law](#) 2.0, a proposal that would strengthen a law passed five years ago, which aimed to restrict cyber-bullying. This proposal was named after Grace McComas, a 15-year-old girl who took her own life in 2012 after being tormented online. The law may be coming at a good time; as teenagers are using social media more than ever, the suicide rate has started to climb for the first time in decades and studies suggest that there may be a correlation.

There has been an unprecedented growth in teenage depression in the 2010s, and it's starting to become a pandemic. More than [two million teenagers](#) reported having severe depression in 2016, with one out of every five teens experiencing depression before adulthood. Similarly, 6.3 million teens have had an [anxiety disorder](#) before adulthood, accounting for 30 percent of girls and 20 percent of boys. This cannot be chalked up to classic teenage angst. This level of depression and anxiety in our nation's teens has never been the norm. We have seen a 37 percent [increase in teenage depression](#) since 2005. From 2010 to 2015, there has been a 28 percent increase in [teenage suicides](#). It has become apparent that our country's children may be on the brink of a mental health catastrophe.

One's initial reaction may be to attribute this to a change in the amount of free time that high school students are being given, to say that they are getting more homework or spending more time on extra-curriculars. But that's not the case. High school students in the 2010s are spending approximately the same amount of time on their [homework](#) as their forerunners in the 1990s. They are also spending the same amount of time on sports and clubs, and as [less teens are part of the workforce](#) now than ever before, they generally have more free time than those in the 1990s did.

So why are teenagers now experiencing depression and suicidal thoughts more than ever before? Taking a look at one of the largest changes this generation has seen may give us the answer. In 2014, one in every four teens said they were online almost constantly. Just four years later, nearly one in every two teens say they are [online almost constantly](#). In this same time period, the number of [teenagers who own a smartphone](#) has gone up by 30 percent. However, being online may not be the major factor behind this noticeable uptick in depression. It may be the now uber-present social media causing this pervasive change.

Social media has been rising at an exceptional rate since the 2000s, and is quickly expanding to teenagers and even preteens. Nearly 94 percent of all teens are active on social media in some form, using anything from [Snapchat to Twitch to Reddit](#).

Seventy-six percent of teens use Instagram, and 75 percent of teens report using [Snapchat](#). Other popular social media sources include Facebook (68 percent of teens), Twitter (47 percent) and Tumblr (28 percent).<sup>8</sup> Instagram has seen a 50 percent increase in usage from teens since 2015, and [Snapchat](#) has seen an 83 percent increase in usage. Social media has almost become a necessity for teenagers across the nation.

Whether it's social media or other material, teens are spending, on average, upwards of eight hours per day [online](#). Those who spend more than five hours a day on electronic devices were 70 percent more likely to have suicidal thoughts than those with only [one hour of electronic use per day](#). Teens spending just three hours a day on electronic devices were at a 35 percent greater risk for having [suicidal thoughts](#). The statistics clearly point towards a correlation between teenagers experiencing depression and teenagers using social media at a higher rate than ever before.

Upon realizing that a correlation exists between these two things, an obvious question followed: Why? What was it about social media that was causing these teens to be so unhappy? When asked about the effects of social media, only 24 percent of teenagers say that social media has a mostly negative effect on their lives.

Thirty-three percent report a [positive effect on their lives](#), and nearly half of the respondents said that the effect of social media was neutral. The main reason teenagers argue that social media plays a negative role in their lives is due to [cyberbullying](#) and rumor spreading. Another major reason is the [unrealistic view](#) of others' lives that we often see on social media. Active users of social media generally try to put out the 'best' image of themselves possible, leaving others feeling left out and discontent with their own lives. Feeling left out has been on the rise.

Forty-eight percent more girls and 27 percent more boys reported [these feelings](#) in 2015 compared to 2010.

In a world becoming more advanced and evolved by the minute, with new technological innovations being conjured up daily, we may be overlooking the impact that technology has on our nation's teenagers. The 2010s have seen an unprecedented number of teenagers having depression or suicidal thoughts, and social media may be at the forefront of what's causing it.

If you or someone you know may be experiencing depression or having suicidal thoughts, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

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