Social media and children's resilience formation during and following COVID-19

Barbara Melamed*

Department of Clinical Affiliate Professor of Psychology, University of Hawaii, Manoa, United States

INTRODUCTION

This urgent need to understand and remediate childrens' sense of resilience was born out of the national and global growth in mental health issues facing young people today. Rates of depression and anxiety have increased steadily over the past two decades (Office of the Surgeon General 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic — with all the isolation, disruptions, and anxieties associated with it — only served to exacerbate the problem (Anderson M, 2018). Recent data indicate that 1 out of every 6 adolescents struggles with significant depression, and nearly 1 in 3 have an anxiety disorder. These rates increase to 50% when we include individuals reporting lower levels of generalized distress (Office of the Surgeon General 2021). Importantly, these mental health challenges are associated with substantial problems in school and a decline in general well-being (Dindo L, 2023).

The most alarming outcome associated with our youth's mental health crisis is suicide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported a 25% increase in rates of suicide in the past decade. In fact, suicide accounts for more deaths among youths than all natural causes combined (Hauser S, 1991). It is the second leading cause of death, following accidents, for adolescents (Centers for Disease Control 2014). The availability of guns, whether through friends' or parents' legal purchase or lack of safety is an even more widespread concern (Jiang J, 2018).

With the widespread availability of technology and over 90% of teenagers 13–17 years-old reporting social media use, any discussion about the mental health crisis affecting youths must acknowledge the role of social media (Lenhart A, 2015). There is strong evidence showing an association between time spent on social media and increased rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide-related outcomes among adolescents. Social media use has been linked to poor sleep quality, body image issues, and lowered self-esteem for youths.(Pahl K, 2023).

However, during COVID-19 social media and digital technology became a tool for continued social interaction and development of resilience skills (Slomski A, 2021).

Pew Research reported (2018) that teens who socialize on the internet are still likely to see their friends in person. Previous Pew Research Center surveys have similarly found that the use of internet and social media is linked to stronger social ties, both among teens and adults. A 2014 Center survey of teens ages 13 to 17 found that those who had access to a smartphone or used social media were more likely than non-users of those technologies to keep in touch daily with their close friends. (Stark A, 2020) (Figure 1).

Over the past two decades, video game and internet technology have shifted, eliminating the need to be in the same room as a requirement for playing games with friends and others. Innovations in game design and platforms have increased the opportunities to interact and socialize while playing. These changes have enabled teen gamers to play games both with others in person (83%) and online (75%). Teen gamers also play games with different types of people – they play with friends they know in person (89%), friends they know only online (54%), and online with others who are not friends (52%). These capabilities have enhanced teens' opportunities to interact and spend time with friends and others in meaningful ways while gaming (Twenge Jean M, 2018).

- Encourage youths to do things that are meaningful and important even when it may be hard or uncomfortable,

- Teach them how to manage difficult thoughts and emotions by growing their strengths.

- Help them live out their full potential.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE FIGHTS

➢ Teens Who Have Access to Mobile Technology Are More Likely to Be Involved in Conflicts That Originate Online or in Text Messages

➢ Taking Actions: Behave in ways that are consistent with what matters most.

➢ Pew research centeraugust 4, 2015

➢ Teens, technology and friendships

Teen Girls More Likely to Text, Call and Use Social Media to Get in Touch; Boys More Likely to Use Gaming

% of teens who count the following platforms as one of the three most common ways they talk with their closest friend

Platform	GIRLS	BOYS
Text messaging	84%	75%
Phone calls	75	62
Social Network Site	72	60
Video sharing site	10	9
Blogging site	6	2
Game site or server	3	39
Discussion site	3	5

Source: Pew Research Center's Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=1,009 teens ages 13 to 17 who have a close friend).
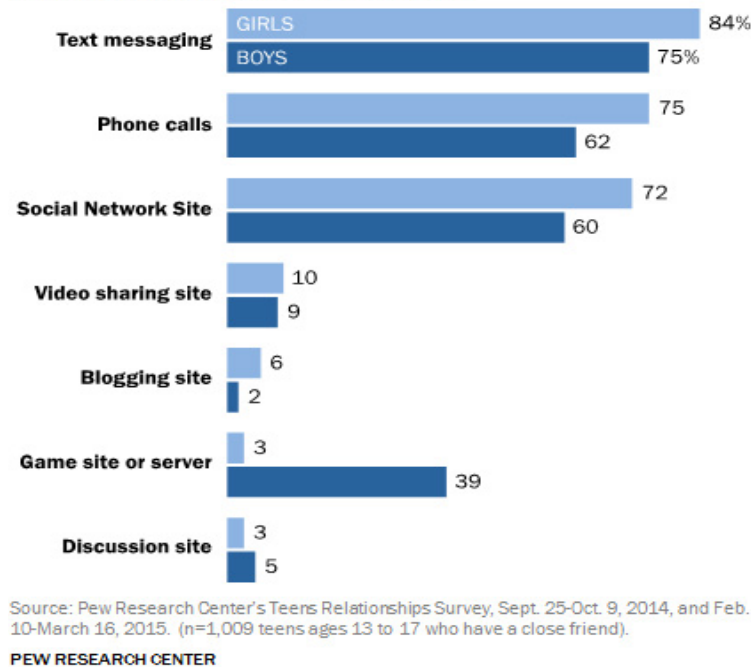
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1. Teen Girls more likely to Text, Call and use Social media to get in touch; Boys more likely to use gaming.

Parents do not pay enough attention to the interactions their children are having online.

Data from Pew Research Center show that 31% of social media users have fought with a friend over something that occurred online.

Besides demographics, how teens use and interact with technology is correlated with whether they have had negative experiences facilitated by the web or a text message (Vogel EA, 2014).

Social media use is a big predictor of whether a teen has been involved in a fight over something that occurred in a digital space. Some 31% of social media-using teens say they have quarreled with a friend because of something that happened online or by text; for teens who do not use social media, that share falls to 11%.

So- what is it we can add to the social media platform to turn this technology into a positive outlet. Some examples do exist and we need to utilize the internet outlets including Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram to catch up with further tools we can develop.

The Baker Institute team has developed a scientifically-based, fun and interactive program for young people in 7th and 8th grades — LIFE HACS (Life Hacks with Acceptance Commitment Skills). This program will be implemented in school settings to ensure that all students in these grades obtain the key skills needed to build their resilience and well-being.

LIFE HACS consists of five, 45-minute sessions that are interactive and engaging. It is strength-based, flexible, and applied to universal human challenges. The overall goals are 1) encourage youths to do things that are meaningful and important even when it may be hard or uncomfortable, 2) teach them how to manage difficult thoughts and emotions by growing their strengths, and 3) help them live out their full potential (Wood J, 2012).

OVERALL GOALS OF LIFE HACS:

- Accepting: How to manage strong and difficult thoughts and emotions.

- Clarifying: Who and what is most important?

- Taking Actions: Behave in ways that are consistent with what matters most.

- Specifically focusing on how to behave when confronted by a friend using guns for fun, shooting birds, competing on targets.

Our team at Behavior Medicine Associates would like to develop a program called "Winners' Bouts". The goal to

help adolescent and preteenager children turn away from fighting whether with mouth -threatening words, or tools of danger…and still maintain friendship and acceptance. This is one step in resilience training. (Hauser, S. with Powers, S. and Noam, G. (1991) Adolescents and their Families: Paths of Ego Development NY: The Free Press a division of Macmillan, Inc.

Future research should involve how family systems may influence children's' accessing positive social models on the internet and in their television preferences. We can make competitive gaming lead to improved social skills learning and enhanced pleasure in relationships.

Social media lets teens create online identities, chat with others and build social networks. These networks can provide teens with support from other people who have hobbies or experiences in common. This type of support especially may help teens who: `

• Lack social support offline or are lonely.

• Are going through a stressful time.

• Belong to groups that often get marginalized, such as racial minorities, the LGBTQ community and those who are differently abled.

• Have long-term medical conditions.

SOMETIMES, SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS HELP TEENS:

• Express themselves.

• Connect with other teens locally and across long distances.

• Learn how other teens cope with challenging life situations and mental health conditions.

• View or take part in moderated chat forums that encourage talking openly about topics such as mental health.

• Ask for help or seek healthcare for symptoms of mental health conditions.

These healthy effects of social media can help teens in general. They also may help teens who are prone to depression stay connected to others. And social media that's humorous or distracting may help a struggling teen cope with a challenging day.

REFERENCES

Anderson, M., Jiang, J (2018). "Teens, Social Media and Technology 2018." *Pew Res Cen*. 31.

Centers for Disease Control (2014)

Dindo, L., Lindsay, J (2023). "Destigmatizing Mental Health and Cultivating Resilience".

Hauser, S., Powers, S., Noam, G (1991) Adolescents and their Families: Paths of Ego Development NY: The Free Press a division of Macmillan, Inc. *J Early Child Lit*. 23(1): 8–34.

Jiang, J. (2018) Teens who are constantly online are just as likely to socialize with their friends offline. *Pew Res Foun*. 28.

Lenhart, A. (2015) Teens, technology and friendships.

Office of the Surgeon General (2021). Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory

Pahl, K., Scott, F., Hall, M., Kucirkova , N., Burke, A (2023). Children's digital play as collective family resilience in the face of the pandemic. 28. Slomski, A (2021). ." *JAMA*.

Stark, A., White, A., Rotter, N (2020). Shifting from survival to supporting resilience in children and families in the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons for informing U.S. mental health priorities. *Psych Trau*. 12(S1): S133–S135.

Twenge Jean, M., Thomas, E., Joiner Megan, L., Rogers Gabrielle, N., Martin (2018). "Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among US Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time." *Clin Psychol Sci*. 1: 3–17.

Vogel, EA, JP., Rose, LR., Roberts K, Eckles. (2014). "Social Comparison, Social Media, and Self-Esteem". *Psychol Pop Media Cult*. 4: 206.

Wood, J., Lynne-Landsman, SDLanger, DA., Wood, PA., Clark, SL. Mark Eddy, et al. (2012). "School Attendance Problems and Youth Psychopathology: Structural Cross-Lagged Regression Models in Three Longitudinal Data Sets." Child Dev. 351–66.