Know the Risks -
Social Media and Mental Health

Social media refers to the many online ways that people communicate with each other, create or share content, and collaborate. The interactions can be direct or indirect, live or recorded, and passive or proactive. Social media allows connections with anyone, anywhere at any time and there are few guardrails to automatically protect individuals, especially children, from most content.

There are some benefits to social media for youth:

- ✅ Provides positive community and connection with others who share identities, abilities, and interests.
- ✅ Can provide access to important information and allow space for self-expression.
- ✅ Allows youth to develop friendships and social connections online, which is especially important for children who experience exclusion or have disabilities or chronic illnesses.
- ✅ Social media-based and other digitally-based mental health interventions may also be helpful for some children and adolescents by promoting help-seeking behaviors and serving as a gateway to initiating mental health care.

Though there are benefits to social media, there are also potential risks

- ❌ Children who spend more than 3 hours each day on social media had double the risk of having poor mental health including symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- ❌ There is a higher risk of harm in adolescent girls and youth who may already be experiencing poor mental health. This can be seen in body image and disordered eating behaviors, poor sleep quality and even cyberbullying-related depression.
- ❌ High usage can expose them to bullying, rumor spreading, unrealistic views of other people's lives and peer pressure.

How can youth help reduce risks related to their own social media use?

- ✅ It's okay to give yourself some space - Limit how much time you spend on social media.
- ✅ Create boundaries to help balance online and offline activities.
- ✅ Be careful about what you share -- what you post will be very hard to take back or remove
- ✅ Protect yourself and others -- if the sites you visit make you feel bad, unfollow them. Before you post something about yourself or someone else, consider if you would make this comment in an in-person setting
- ✅ If you see something, say something - Don't keep online harassment or abuse a secret and don't take part in online harassment or abuse.
- ✅ Remember that what people post, or what you see, may not be honest or real presentations of their experiences or lives

How can parents help reduce the risks related to social media use?

- ✅ Work together - create a family media plan that you can all help each other follow.
- ✅ Develop healthy boundaries - create tech-free zones and times inside and outside of your home.
- ✅ Support real-world engagement when possible - encourage children to foster in-person friendships
- ✅ Be a great example and model responsible social media behavior
- ✅ Teach kids about technology and empower them to be responsible online participants at the appropriate age
- ✅ Report cyberbullying and online abuse and exploitation