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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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**Start Talking!**   
*Building a Drug-Free Future*

## Know! Social Media is Bringing Our Teens Down

According to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there was a 33% increase in the number of teens experiencing depression, a 23% rise in teen suicide attempts, and a 31% surge in the number of teens who died by suicide in the five years between 2010 to 2015. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Foundation says suicide is now the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 to 24.

What has gone wrong in the lives of our teens and why at such an alarming rate? Despite the critical nature of this question, there are no clear answers. There is, however, a great deal of speculation, and many say our kids' use of social media contributes this high suicide rate.

In a paper published in *Clinical Psychological Science*, researcher Jean Twenge and her colleagues found significant increases in depression, suicide attempts, and suicide in teens from every background in late 2012. At the same time, smartphone ownership crossed the 50% threshold. By 2015, just three years later the number of teens with access to smartphones grew to a whopping 73%.

Twenge says that not only did smartphone use and depression increase in tandem, but she and her research team also discovered that as teens spent more time online they were more likely to display at least one suicide risk factors. In fact, youth who spent five or more hours online each day were 71% more likely than those who spent only one hour a day online to have at least one suicide risk factor (depression, thinking about suicide, making a suicide plan, or attempting suicide). The researchers found that spending more than two hours a day online caused suicide risk factors to rise significantly.

There are several key elements of social media that can cause a teen – or person of any age for that matter – harm.

- 1. Cyberbullying:** We've heard a lot on this topic: new-age, adolescent bullying that takes place on digital devices, mainly on cell phones, with the intent to embarrass, hurt, or humiliate another. It has become a common occurrence with nearly 43% of teens reporting having been bullied online at least once, according to [DoSomething.org](http://DoSomething.org).
- 2. Picture-Perfect Lives:** Teens spend hours upon hours scrolling through Instagram, Snapchat, and other social media feeds that feature images of their peers hanging out together and having the time of their lives, BFFs smiling and posing for the camera, and pictures from epic parties where only a select group was invited. It is no surprise that such images cause others to feel left out, disconnected, and ultimately unworthy.
- 3. Social Isolation:** Social isolation is a major risk factor for depression and suicide. More time spent online means less time spent face-to-face with others, and less time spent doing activities that promote mental health, like



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getting exercise, volunteering, meeting new friends, and participating in group activities.

4. **Sleep Deficit:** Inadequate sleep is another major risk factor for depression and suicide. Youth who spend a great deal of time on their phones are more likely than others not to be getting the sleep they need. Texts, instant messages, and other signals to pick up that phone come in all hours of the night and may be too tempting to avoid.

At this point, you may be considering returning a cell phone purchased as a gift for your teen, but you should know that we're not necessarily encouraging that. What we are encouraging is that you to keep an eye out for the New Year Know! Tip to follow, as we'll provide important steps you can take to help protect your child from a potential downward smartphone spiral.

In the meantime, if you have mental health concerns regarding your child, don't hesitate to reach out to your pediatrician or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK [8255]).

Sources: [Clinical Psychological Science: Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time](#). Nov. 14, 2017. By Jean M. Twenge, et. al.

[The Washington Post: Teenage depression and suicide are way up — and so is smartphone use](#). Nov. 19, 2017. By Jean M. Twenge.

[DoSomething.org: 11 Facts You Should Know About Cyber Bullying](#).

[The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Youth](#).

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