

# Survey finds young Americans are using social media to address mental health issues ... caused by social media

17 March 2021, by Terry Collins



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As social media contributes to depression among some U.S. teens and young adults amid the COVID-19 pandemic, they are ironically using that technology to tackle their mental health struggles, a new study shows.

That complex finding is among the results from more than 1,500 14- to 22-year-olds surveyed by Common Sense Media in a study released Wednesday titled "Coping with COVID-19: How Young People Use Digital Media to Manage Their Mental Health."

The study was done last fall. It found that while [social media](#) can affect a young person's [mental health](#)—including more exposure to hateful rhetoric such as racism, sexism and body shaming—in the midst of a pandemic, most are using those same platforms and other digital tools to seek support. That includes asking their peers if they are experiencing similar conditions and reaching out to telehealth professionals.

"Of course it's a double-edged sword," said Vicky Rideout, one of the survey's lead researchers. "Once we look at how and why they use social [media](#), our understanding of the role social media plays in their lives becomes more nuanced."

That's even more so during the pandemic, said Susannah Fox, another lead researcher. "As adults, we can't just drop in their lives and look in from the outside. We have to listen and give them the space to tell us what they are thinking, what they are doing."

A sample of the findings show:

- 69% of young Black Americans encounter racist content online and on social media; they are two times as likely as white youth to have either had a COVID-19 infection themselves or within the family;
- About 74% of LGBTQ youth encounter homophobic content online and on social media; about 64% of them report moderate to [severe depression](#) (twice that of non-LGBTQ youth), and 19% are at risk of alcohol and substance abuse.
- About 67% of young Hispanic Americans encounter racist content online, and 19% have had COVID-19 or within the family—twice as many as their white counterparts. Additionally, 24% have taken on more family responsibilities since the start of the pandemic.

"These are really sobering findings," Fox said. "While we want to shine a light on possible solutions, many young people are in a dark place, and we want to give them the tools that they need to survive."

Rideout agreed.

"Young people are going through periods in their lives that are both crucial developmentally and tumultuous, even in the best of times," Rideout said. "And that's all been completely upended because of the [pandemic](#)."

"While social media may bring them some tragedies, it can also bring them hope and empowerment," Rideout said.

"And beauty," Fox added.

The survey also found 69% of young people surveyed have used [health](#) apps related to managing depression, meditation and stress reduction, and about 86% who connected online with a mental health provider say they found it helpful.

Fox said while the survey provides great insights and shows how some [young people](#) are determined when addressing their mental health, there's still a long way to go.

"This is an opportunity for us to learn from them how to use technology, not only to make connections but for resiliency," Fox said. "It's an opportunity to meet them where they are."

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