

Teenagers in the Online World

Depression and anxiety are major problems for teenage social media users.

By Michael A. Kashmer / *Digital Broadband Programming Consultant*

How are kids managing in this digital world? Teenagers, like many adults, are swamped by technology overload and a myriad of choices.

With streaming video alone, there are so many programs to consider. This is referred to as “subscription fatigue.”

However, there are big differences in how adults and teenagers use online social platforms. Adult social media users continue with their favorite platforms, YouTube (73 percent) and Facebook (69 percent), while younger users gather at Instagram (37 percent), Snapchat (24 percent) and several other sites, according to a February 2019 Pew Research report.

Anxiety and depression top the list of problems that teens see among their peers. Seventy percent of teens see anxiety and depression as major problems. This category is followed by bullying (55 percent) and drug/alcohol addiction (51 percent). Does this data fill in some of the blanks about where teen stress comes from? Again, thanks to Pew Research Center for this data.

Concern about mental health cuts across gender, racial and socioeconomic lines. The pressure teens feel to excel in school is tied to their postgraduation goals.

Although a majority of U.S. colleges admit most students who apply, the elite colleges grab all the attention when it comes to admissions. More than half of 1,364 postsecondary schools admitted two-thirds or more of their 2017 applicants. By contrast, just 17 schools admitted fewer than 10 percent of applicants.

From current media reports, anyone would think most students are at their wits’ end trying to get accepted at any college. Why else would wealthy parents pay college coaches obscene amounts of money to land a coveted college perch? Although the elite schools are few in number, they remain a popular news topic, even on talk shows and late-night TV.

The students involved with these payoffs, perhaps only peripherally, must be under enormous stress. And the other students and parents who read these stories and are doing their best to get into college are experiencing high anxiety, to say the least.

Given the stress that college admissions cause our future leaders to experience and the pressure to find a well-paying

career upon graduation, is it any wonder that young people voice displeasure with a host of industries and companies?

A poll by Money magazine in 2017 showed that 62 percent of U.S. teens aged 16 to 19 say a career in the oil and gas industry is unappealing. That includes 39 percent who say the industry is *very* unappealing. Big Oil’s environmental challenges and boom-to-bust cycles create a negative stigma that will make attracting talent difficult in the future.

Not surprisingly, young people want to work for the energy companies of the future. Two-thirds of those polled said that a job working in green energy sounds appealing. Young people have the most to lose from rising sea levels caused by carbon emissions.

NAVIGATING INTERNET DANGERS

A new social media application called sexting began in Australia about 2005 and quickly became so popular that “sexting” was added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in 2012. New sharing technologies have made participation easier for teens.

Common Sense Media (www.commonsense.org/education) offers an excellent handbook that can help teens and parents navigate this new way of communicating.

When you look at this site, be aware that some stories may be shocking, but they describe real experiences of teens who tried sexting. These stories help explain why sexting can be so problematic.

Many adults and schools are panicking. Some think sexting is horrible, stupid and likely to ruin teens’ futures. Others think it is no big deal. Which is it, and what do we need to know to make the right decision?

Here’s what the Common Sense Media handbook says: “The more knowledgeable you are, the better decisions you are going to make for yourself and the better advice you’ll be able to give to a friend.” ♦

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