

## Scroll, Stress, Repeat: Who Is Responsible for Teen Mental Health in the Age of Social Media?

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At 2:00 a.m., the glow of a phone screen is often the last thing a teenager sees (myself included). For many, social media is not just an app. It is a space for connection, identity, and expression. A place to interact with friends from the comfort of home. But it is also becoming a source of growing concern, as studies and court cases begin to question its impact on teen mental health.

Research from the Pew Research Center reveals a striking contradiction. While 74% of teens say social media helps them feel more connected, 45% admit they spend too much time on it, and about 1 in 5 say it negatively affects their mental health. These platforms offer a feeling of belonging, yet often fuel comparison, anxiety, and pressure to present a perfect life. If a user fails to meet these standards, they are in for a severe mental decline.

The issue is no longer just personal. It is becoming legal. In a recent case, companies like Meta Platforms and YouTube were found liable for contributing to a teen's mental health struggles. The ruling pointed to design features such as autoplay and infinite scrolling, systems built not by accident, but to maximize attention. Sure, social media is a boredom buster, but is it worth the price of infirmity?

That distinction matters. These platforms are not passive spaces. They are engineered environments, shaped by algorithms that decide what users see and how long they stay. Companies may hold the responsibility of a young person's life in their hands. But when engagement (or revenue) is the goal for apps, well-being can become an afterthought.

Still, social media is not the sole cause of declining mental health. Academic stress, social dynamics, and life outside a screen all play powerful roles. Holding companies accountable does not mean ignoring these factors. It means recognizing influence where it exists.

This is not a call to abandon social media. It is a call to rethink it. If these platforms are shaping a generation, then that generation deserves protection, transparency, and a voice in how those systems are built. The question is no longer whether social media affects teens. The question is whether the companies behind it are willing to take responsibility. However, it is also **your** duty to actually commit to your goals and limit your social media use. So while it may be easy to keep pointing fingers, maybe it is also time to use our thumbs a little more wisely, because in the end, we control the scroll as much as it controls us.

