

Social media and substance use



Social media plays a role in social connection and entertainment for young people. However, social media can make it more likely that teenagers will start using substances and can even connect teens with drug dealers.



Pills ordered off social media might look like real prescriptions, but they may contain fentanyl.



Dealers use emojis to promote drugs on apps like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and SnapChat. Drug deals are often discussed and agreed on in encrypted messaging apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal.

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What role does social media play in substance use?

Teens may see posts on social media that show alcohol and drug use in a positive light. Exposure to posts about substances may be part of the reason young people using social media regularly are more likely to use drugs and alcohol. Tobacco and alcohol companies can also market to teenagers on social media. In addition, drug dealers can easily sell fake pills on social media.

What are fake pills and why are they dangerous?

Young people can buy fake prescription medications online. 60% of these fake pills have enough fentanyl to cause a deadly overdose. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid commonly added to other illicit drugs because it is low-cost and more powerful than heroin or morphine.

What can I do to help prevent my child from buying and using substances from social media?

Stay Involved: Research shows that parent monitoring can help prevent substance use. Pay attention to who your child spends time with (in-person and online) and if this changes. If you find evidence that your child is seeking out drugs online, it's time to start a conversation.

Start talking: Take the time on the drive to school or during dinner to discuss substance use and check in with your kid about whether they are using substances. If you are looking for scripts or conversation starters, check out this [Parent Talk Kit](#) from the Partnership for Drug-free Kids.

[Download the information on this page as a handout \(PDF\)](#)

Sources

Costello, C., & Ramo, D. (2017). Social Media and Substance Use: What Should We Be Recommending to Teens and Their Parents? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 60(6), 629–630. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.03.017>

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