Social Media Consequences of Pediatric Death

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KEYWORDS

- Social media • Pediatrics • Bereavement • Adolescent • Legacy • Deceased • Grief
- Teenagers

KEY POINTS

- Most teenagers have a "social media portfolio" and use many social media platforms.
- Social media is changing the landscape of grief and bereavement in adolescents and adults.
- Social media can be a tool to allow youth to stay connected with previous friends but also an opportunity to engage with other individuals facing similar challenges.
- This use of the Internet social networks to express feelings of grief may be a positive outlet for teens who are grieving.

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is ubiquitous in our current society. It is an intense force that has become a vital tool for social engagement of children and teenagers. To have a relationship with another peer includes connecting through multiple digital affiliations, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat. Child and adolescent psychiatrists will need to be more familiar with social networking, as it plays a vital element of a teenager's inner and external worlds.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Facts for Families in 2011 lists a series of benefits that include staying connected with friends, developing new social contacts with similar interests, sharing content of self-expression such as art work/music, and assisting in development of an identity.[1] Unfortunately, social networking also has created new challenges and struggles for adolescents to navigate. One example of this is "virtual bullying," in which peers share negative content or embarrassing information on social media. These posts can go viral, so instead of just a one group bully it can spread to the entire school. Many of these cases are

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connected to impulsive decision making in which a teen shares too much information or inappropriate photos/videos.

Previously, children were exposed to traditional media (television, radio, periodicals) that were externally created by production companies with limitations around material content. Unlike traditional media, social media is not just consumed by users, but teenagers are creating the active content. The boundaries between what is appropriate or inappropriate is not defined by outside forces, and information is constantly flowing back and forth. Furthermore, youth are engaging[2] with digital content as young as 4 months compared with children in 1970 who began television screening at age 4 years old. A trend has begun to show less engagement with traditional media and an uptick in social media use. The Kaiser Family Foundation reported that in 2011, 52% of children 0 to 8 years of age had access to a mobile device, and by 2013 it had increased to 75%.[3] Currently, 3 of 4 teenagers own a phone and up to 50% have reported feeling "addicted to it."[2]

Recent Pew reports have demonstrated that most 13-year-old to 17-year-old teenagers have a "social media portfolio" in which they use multiple platforms to connect. The rates of site use are Facebook (71%), Instagram (52%), Snapchat (41%), and (Twitter 33%). As most teenagers engage with Facebook, further details show that typical teenagers have approximately 145 friends with equal use between boys and girls.[4] In addition, data have shown teenagers spend approximately 1 hour and 11 minutes a day, 7 days a week on social media.[5]

Research has begun to expand on increasing the understanding and effects of social media. Well-known psychological mechanisms are now seen in a digital form, such as social comparison (comparing oneself to others, either better or worse), impression management (highlighting attractive elements of themselves or life while withholding negative aspects), and self-disclosure (revealing confidential information about themselves). By having another venue to use these methods, social media can help with developmental tasks of autonomy, intimacy, and peer engagement. Most teenagers report that social media is a positive experience, with an increase in self-esteem, a safe place for self-exploration, and an increase in social capital (access points for social relationships). Research has also shown negative consequences with associations of an increase in depression, social anxiety, exposure to inappropriate content, and cyberbullying.[5]

SOCIAL MEDIA AND LIFE-LIMITING ILLNESSES

A life-limiting illness can be a traumatic experience and forces an individual to confront his or her own mortality. This can lead to a wide range of psychosocial challenges and a feeling of isolation. For adolescents who are working through the developmental task of learning how to have relationships outside of their family, a larger deficit may occur. Social media can be a tool to allow youth to stay connected with previous friends but also an opportunity to engage with other individuals facing similar challenges.[6] The ability to connect with peers, such as those with cancer, via social media has led to online de facto community support groups. An immense power can be derived from the ability to connect 24 hours a day/7 days a week anywhere in the world with a virtual friend facing similar obstacles.[7] For individuals who have rare disorders or are isolated by geographic locations, social media opens a possibility to find other individuals with their disease without leaving home.[8] Teenagers have been reported to dialogue about complications from their disease, such as fertility, relationships, loss of autonomy, interruptions in school/work, and financial implications, through social media.[9]