


# CASE SCENARIO FOR PROVIDERS

## SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES

### Medical Appointment with Kai (17)

Pediatric and adolescent providers can integrate conversations about media use into health consultations with increased confidence knowing that their acknowledgement and guidance can have a positive influence on youth and families. A healthy relationship with a trusted adult is a protective factor for youth mental health and many youth trust health care providers' expertise.<sup>1</sup> Talk about social media in the spirit of health and wellness, not judgment and control. Engage with youth and their caregivers by demonstrating curiosity and offering your partnership.<sup>2</sup>



**TIP:** Submit any questions you have to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [Center for Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health Q&A Portal](#) for a personalized and evidence-based response. Patients can also look to the portal for additional support outside of the office.

The [AAP's policy statement](#) on media use offers some key recommendations for pediatricians.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### PEDIATRICIANS

- Work with families and schools to promote understanding of the benefits and risks of media.
- Promote adherence to guidelines for adequate physical activity and sleep via a Family Media Use Plan ([www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan](http://www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan)).
- Advocate for and promote information and training in media literacy.
- Be aware of tools to screen for sexting, cyberbullying, problematic Internet use, and Internet gaming disorder.

**Kai, a 17-year-old, presents to his provider with anxiety symptoms. Kai completed the GAD-7 and did not meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder. After the provider reviews health history and completes assessments and other routine services, they engage the youth in a conversation that includes social media use.**



**Provider:** So, Kai, what more could you tell me about the anxiety you're experiencing?

**Kai:** I feel like there's always something I'm stressed out about. Like, it's my senior year so there's a lot of pressure to know what I want to do when I graduate, to have a plan, to get my grades up ... and even though I want to make a plan, it's all just too much to deal with, so nothing ends up getting done.



**Provider:** That does sound stressful and you're not alone. Actually, that is a cycle a lot of people with anxiety find themselves in. Thanks for letting me know. What do you do for downtime? Everyone needs some of that.

**Kai:** I listen to music. I have playlists for every mood. (Gestures to the phone in their hand.)



**Provider:** Music, that's great. How about social media?

**Kai:** Umm, all the usual stuff. TikTok, Snapchat. Just scrolling through whatever.



**Provider:** We used to ask about "screen time," but we're learning there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. What's more important is the quality of your experience using social media, because there are still risks and there are also benefits.

**Kai:** I totally expected the "screen time" lecture (smiles). I do feel like my screen time is kind of high, which I know isn't great, but I don't really know what to do about it.



**Provider:** No lectures! I'd rather hear from you on how you gauge your own use of social media – what feels healthy and how do you recognize when it's not the best use of your time?

**Kai:** Well, it's how I keep up with friends, and even school has an online portal for study groups and stuff, so I need to use it. But if I can't sleep because I'm stressed, it's easy to lose track of time just scrolling mindlessly, and suddenly it's like 2 a.m., and then my anxiety skyrockets because I have to get up for school the next day and I need to get enough sleep so I can focus on my work.



**Provider:** It's great that you recognize how social media impacts you. On one hand, it's a way to stay in touch with friends and it's a regular part of school and life. On the other hand, you can tell it tips the balance when it cuts into sleep and makes your anxiety symptoms feel worse.

**Kai:** Yeah, that's right.



**Provider:** If you were to do something different, pick a small experiment to change things up, what would you try?

**Kai:** (Thinking) Well, I still like a bit of mindless scrolling because it helps ... for a little while. I don't know ... maybe by 10 p.m. I could switch over to a music playlist or something. Maybe I could set up a new one just for this. I just don't know if it's going to work.



**Provider:** With most experiments it's kind of expected to not get it exactly right the first time. The question would be, "What did I learn about that and what do I want to adjust?" If the playlist idea works, that's amazing! If you still find yourself in this type of anxiety loop, what could be a plan B?

**Kai:** Well, my English class has a bunch of required reading I could do – actual books, not online. Thanks for not just telling me what to do.



**Provider:** You're welcome, Kai. When I see you in two weeks, maybe you can play me one of the songs from the new playlist.



## RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

Visit the [AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health website](#) and check out the following resources for more information and tools:

- **Frameworks Institute:** [Strategies for Effectively Communicating About Toxic Stress](#)
- **Youth Engaged 4 Change:** [Tip Sheet on Social Media Use and Mental Health](#)
- **American Psychological Association:** [Social Media and the Internet](#)

Access the following resources for information you can share directly with parents:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [Research-based Tips from Pediatricians for Families](#)
- **Common Sense Media:** [Parenting, Media and Everything in Between](#)
- **American Psychological Association:** [Keeping Teens Safe on Social Media: What Parents Should Know to Protect Their Kids](#)

## REFERENCES

1. Snell, A. & Kline, J. (2022, July-October). Findings from an online assessment of youth ages 13-18 years old [Unpublished internal document]. Commissioned from Lake Research Partners by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.
2. Moreno, M.A., Klein, J.D, Kaseeska, K., Gorzkowski, J., Harris, D., Davis, J., Gotlieb, E., & Wasserman, R. (2023, August 12). A cluster randomized controlled trial of a primary care provider-delivered social media counseling intervention. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.06.007>.

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