

Double-Edged Scroll

THE PARADOX OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH



In June 2024, SSCG Media Group surveyed 150 pediatricians through its proprietary panel of healthcare professionals, MAP MD™, to assess the impact social media has on the mental health of children. According to the survey results, social media has been noted as one of the main topics being linked to mental health discussions with children by 78% of pediatricians. Some of the biggest risks being observed as it relates to mental health and social media include body image, cyberbullying, depression and anxiety.

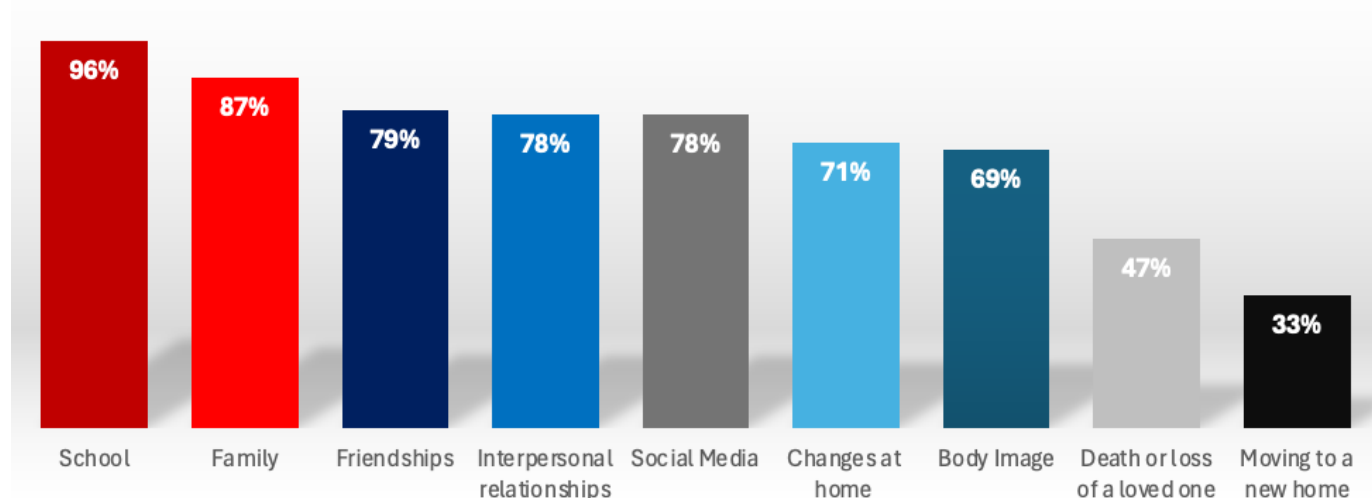
Pediatricians Report Rise in Children's Mental Health Concerns Post-Pandemic

According to the survey results, 89% of pediatricians reported seeing an increase in mental health concerns among children since the COVID-19 pandemic. This may be why a large majority (97%) of survey respondents are screening for mental health. Interestingly, 71% are screening for mobile device usage as there is an assumed link between the use of mobile devices and access to social media. In fact, 75% of pediatricians noted they are likely to recommend strict limitations on children's smartphone usage.

Social Media Noted as a Main Topic Linked to Mental Health Discussions with Children

As conversations about mental health are on the rise, pediatricians are taking an active role in the discussions with their young patients. An astonishing 100% of respondents noted they are speaking to their patients about mental health, with more than half beginning these conversations with children at the age of 9. There are several topics driving these discussions in addition to social media, including school, family, friendships and interpersonal relationships.

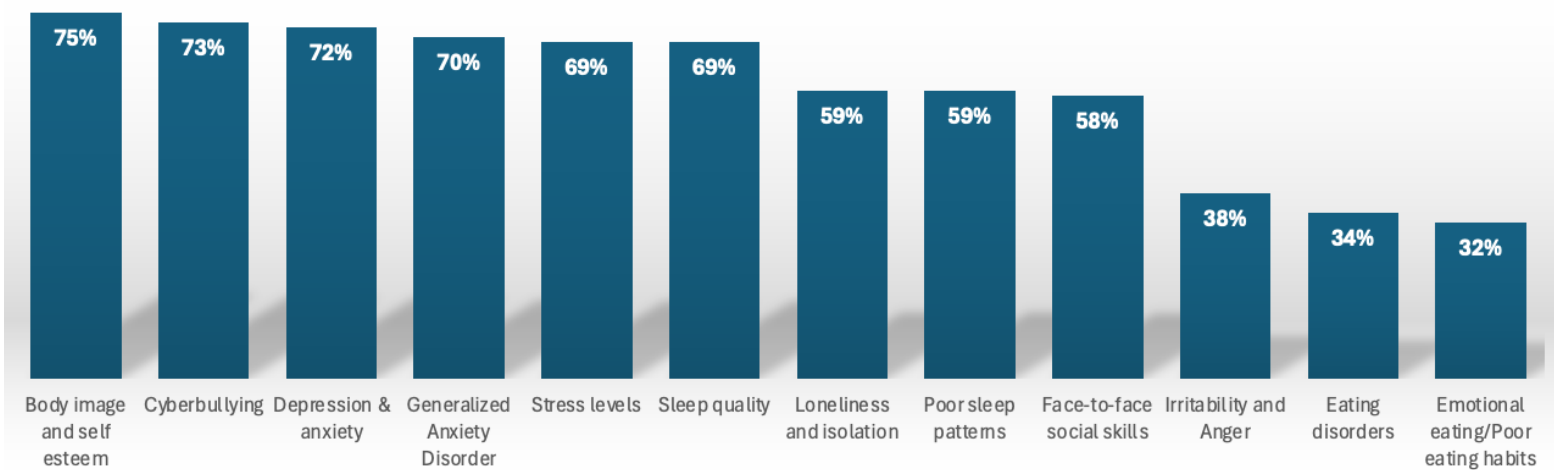
Topics Pediatricians are Discussing with Patients Regarding their Mental Health



Social Media's Growing Influence

Social media platforms have become an undeniable part of childhood in today's digital age. While these platforms offer connection and creativity, there is a growing body of research investigating the potential downsides for young minds. This exploration into the mental health impacts of social media on children aims to shed light on how these online experiences can influence everything from self-esteem, cyberbullying and anxiety to poor sleep patterns, loneliness and isolation and face-to-face social skills. A majority believe that "tweens," or children between the ages of 9 and 12, are most vulnerable to the negative effects of social media, followed by teens.

Biggest Risks Observed for Children's Mental Health Related to Social Media



Pediatricians See Social Media as a Double Edged-Sword for Mental Health

The SSCG survey results suggest that pediatricians view social media as a factor that could influence a child's well-being. In fact, 89% believe that social media can negatively impact a child's mental health. Those social media platforms that allow users to create, share and discover video content and encourage commentary pose the biggest risk, while platforms that allow visual discovery, recipes, inspiration and style have a positive impact.

However, 43% of pediatricians did note they have observed positive influences of social media on children's mental health. According to verbatim comments from this survey, pediatricians find that social media provides a sense of community in well-controlled social media platforms, reduces isolation, helps children feel connected and understood and provides emotional support, especially for children suffering from disease.

A Window of Opportunity

The survey results suggest that there is a window of opportunity to optimize children's mental health through early intervention. With pediatricians already positioned as trusted sources of healthcare information, they are well-placed to help parents navigate the challenges and opportunities that social media presents for their children. According to the survey, a significant majority (91%) of pediatricians agree that they should use their influence as healthcare professionals to educate parents about the social media impact on mental health.

The overwhelming majority (95%), believe more education and awareness is needed around the impact of social media, not just regulations. Eighty five percent believe that stricter regulations are necessary for social media platforms to help manage the implications social media has on children. Further, the survey results also showed that pediatricians are already taking action to address these concerns. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of those surveyed reported they are actively taking steps to educate both parents and children on the potential negative effects of social media on mental health.



Pediatricians want to break the stigma surrounding mental health

There are several ways pediatricians believe they can provide better support to children experiencing mental health issues due to social media. Nearly 90% believe patient education is the leading way to help combat this issue, followed by resources for therapy and counseling, promoting healthy social media boundaries and staying informed of research in this area. Two-thirds of pediatricians reported that breaking the stigma surrounding mental health and encouraging open communication between children and their pediatrician can help address concerns posed by social media.

Two-thirds also noted that parent involvement in treatment plans and providing guidance on monitoring their social media use is another way to help them combat this issue. Sixty-two percent believe they can provide better support to children experiencing health issues due to social media by incorporating social media use into routine check-ups and discussions with patients, while nearly 60% think advocating for stricter regulations on social media platforms can help protect children's mental health.

Pediatricians Already Taking Action

As healthcare professionals are well-placed to make an impact in this area, pediatricians are already taking action to set boundaries around social media use among children. Sixty-five percent are actively educating both children and parents on the potential negative effects of social media on mental health and nearly half are offering resources and advice on how to manage social media use. Pediatricians are also following guidelines set forth by medical associations and referring parents to therapists or mental health professionals to directly address the concern for mental health issues related to social media use.

While pediatricians are being proactive in addressing social media concerns, it is clear they need more help to get ahead of this issue. Eighty-five percent of the survey respondents note the need for more resources to help them navigate conversations about the social media impact on mental health with children. Resources for caregivers and research around the impact of social media on children are noted as primary needs from pharmaceutical companies to help educate parents around social media safety for children. Nearly one-third noted interactive games or tools for kids as a resource they can use to help in education on this topic.

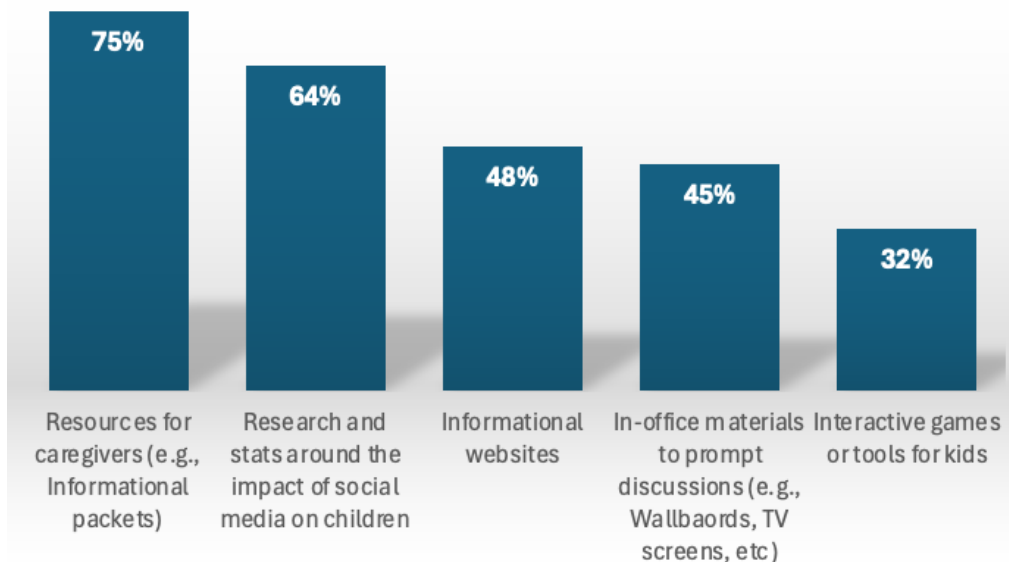


85%

OF RESPONDENTS

Need more resources to help them navigate conversations

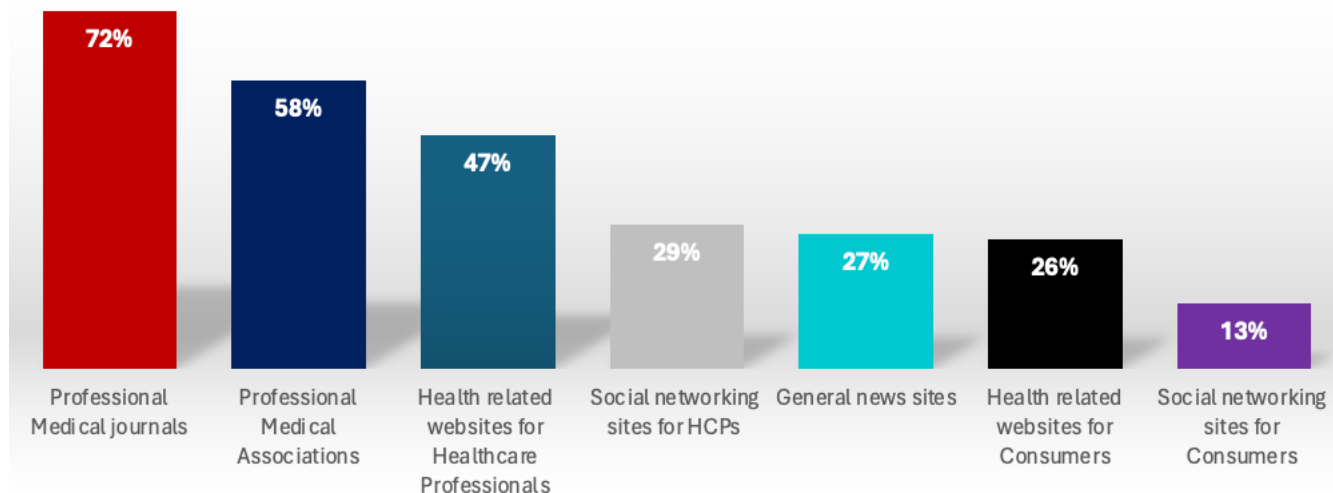
Resources Pediatricians Want Pharmaceutical Companies to Provide to Help Educate Parents Around Social Media Safety for Children



Resources for Pediatricians

Nearly 75% of pediatricians are currently relying heavily on professional medical journals for information about the impact of social media on children. About 60% seek guidance from professional medical associations on the topic, while less than one-third are leveraging social networking sites, general news sites and health related sites to stay informed.

Resources Pediatricians are Currently Using to Get Information About the Impact of Social Media on Children



Parents are Disconnected

According to the survey results, most parents are not initiating conversations with pediatricians regarding concerns of social media and the mental health impact it can be having on their children. This implies a disconnect between pediatricians and parents, as 96% of the respondents believe parents should play a significant role in monitoring their children's social media use. It is evident that patient education around the implications of social media is a significant need.

Additionally, parents are not making the distinction regarding the negative implications of smartphone use, as nearly 60% only occasionally express concerns about their child's smartphone use during medical visits. Nearly 70% of pediatricians surveyed agree that there should be an age restriction for children's smartphone ownership, and 75% are likely to recommend strict limitations on a child's smartphone usage. The majority of pediatricians surveyed (91%) believe that excessive smartphone usage among children can impact their social development and nearly 75% believe it can impact cognitive development.

In Conclusion

The impact of social media on children's mental health is a complex issue with no easy answers. However, by fostering open communication, promoting responsible technology use, and prioritizing mental well-being, we can create a digital landscape that empowers and protects our youth.

As research continues and collaborative efforts take root, we have the potential to harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its potential harms, fostering a future where technology uplifts and supports the healthy development of our children. By understanding the complex relationship between social media and children's mental health, we can begin to develop solutions. As noted by the survey results, it is critical to:



Increase research on the long-term impacts of social media on young minds.



Collaborate with policymakers, technology companies, educators, and mental health professionals to create age-appropriate guidelines and safety features for social media platforms.



Empower parents and caregivers with resources to navigate the digital world with their children and foster healthy social media habits.



Foster educational initiatives to promote digital literacy and critical thinking skills in children.

Social media's negative impact on children's mental health is a pressing public health issue demanding immediate attention. SSCG Media Group is at the forefront of understanding the evolving healthcare landscape and is committed to ongoing, in-depth research on critical topics to gain knowledge about public health issues and emerging health challenges.

THANK YOU

For more information, contact:
Sandra Parrelli
VP, Research & Strategic Insights
SSCG Media Group
sparrelli@sscgmedia.com

