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## Youth Social Media Use and Self-Diagnosis

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*This newsletter is a contribution from [Carol Vidal, MD, PhD](#), Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.*

Youth in the U.S. spend an average of 5 hours a day on social media platforms. Concerns have been raised about the phenomenon of *social contagion* being exacerbated by social media use. Social contagion is the spread of behaviors or even symptoms among groups. For decades, there has been awareness about suicide contagion through the dissemination of celebrity deaths by suicide in traditional media like newspapers and TV, and more recently through fictional stories like the Netflix show “13 Reasons Why.”

Some young people have recently gained “likes” and followers on social media by disclosing mental health information. For example, during the pandemic there was a rise in tics coinciding with the popularization of TikTok, which have become known as “TikTok tics.” Patients have also self-diagnosed disorders such as conversion disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder based on knowledge acquired from social media content creators who displayed or explained these symptoms to their audience.

Primary care providers can help patients and their families understand and minimize these symptoms by asking questions without judgement, trying to understand what is driving the behavior (i.e., need to connect with others, avoidance of responsibilities, belonging to a group), recommending temporary breaks from social media, and encouraging parental monitoring and communication with children about the content being watched. On occasions, more specialized professional help is needed.

For more information, visit the resources below. As always, BHIPP is here to support you in addressing these concerns, the warmline remains open from 9am-5pm Monday through Friday at **855-MD-BHIPP (632-4477)**.

- 1) Johns Hopkins University: [Social Media and Self-Diagnosis](#)
- 2) [Children and Screens](#)
- 3) American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP): [Screen Media Resource Center](#)
- 4) American Academy of Pediatrics: [Surgeon General Advisory Warns of Social Media's Effects on Youth Mental Health](#)
- 5) Pew Research: [Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023](#)
- 6) World Health Organization: [Suicide Prevention](#)
- 7) [The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#)
- 8) CDC: [Suicide Contagion and the Reporting of Suicide: Recommendations from a National Workshop](#)
- 9) [13 Reasons Why Toolkit](#)

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