

Impact of Technology Use on Adolescent Health

September 10, 2026

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Used intentionally, digital tools can help adolescents connect with peers, seek health information and support, and reach resources that are difficult to access through traditional approaches.
2. Most adolescents' use far exceeds that: approximately 64% report 4 or more hours of recreational screen time per day.
3. At these levels, screen time displaces sleep and physical activity, and is consistently associated with higher rates of anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Background

Texas children and adolescents spend most of their time using screens.

Texas school-aged children and adolescents:¹

90%



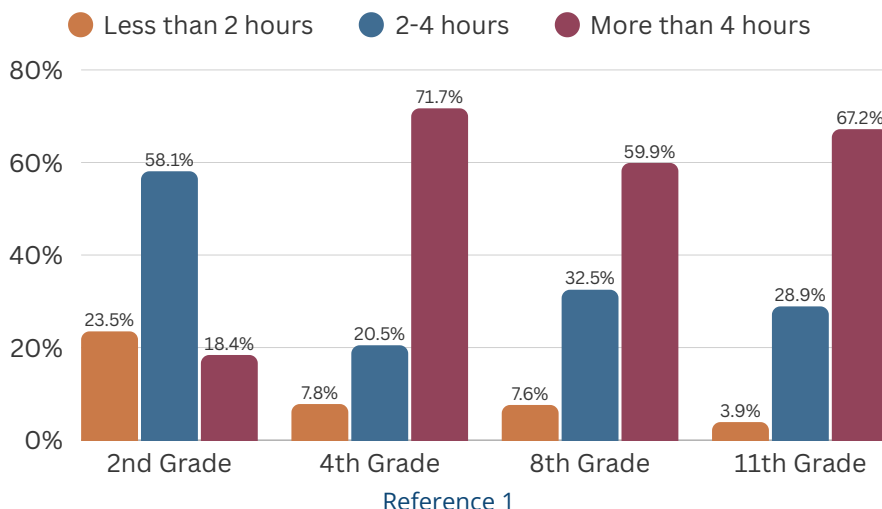
spend 2+ hours/day on recreational screens

80%



have an electronic device in the room where they sleep

Total hours of recreational screen time by grade level in Texas



Increased screen time and sedentary behaviors are associated with negative health outcomes such as:^{2,3}



Increased overweight or obesity



Decreased physical activity



Lower self-esteem

Percentage of Texas children with screens in their bedrooms: ¹

58%

2nd graders

79%

4th graders

90%

8th graders

91%

11th graders

- Screen use is high among both girls and boys.
- In Texas, approximately 56% of girls and 53% of boys spend more than 4 hours per day on recreational screens (used outside of school time), such as tablets and phones, computers, televisions, and video games.¹

Health Impacts

Technology use, while not inherently positive or negative, has been linked to mental health problems.

Technology use can affect: ⁴⁻⁷

Sleep



Nighttime use can interfere with sleep

Physical Activity



Screen use can displace movement

Mental Health



Social media is associated with depression and anxiety

Body Image



Social media content can create comparison to others

Social Connection



Technology supports connection and access to information

- Body dissatisfaction has been linked to risk-taking behaviors and mental health problems, with poor body image also preventing adolescents from engaging in healthy behaviors.⁸
- Approximately 40% of adolescents say that images from social media have caused them to worry about their body image or weight.⁸
- As adolescents develop their own definition of the "ideal appearance," media and other personal factors may contribute to low self-esteem, feelings of depression, and the need to conform to influences on body image.⁸

Potential Benefits to Technology Use: ⁷



Connection



Peer Support



Self-Expression



Health Information



Access to Resources

Potential Concerns to Technology Use: ⁷



Cyberbullying



Harmful Content



Social Comparison



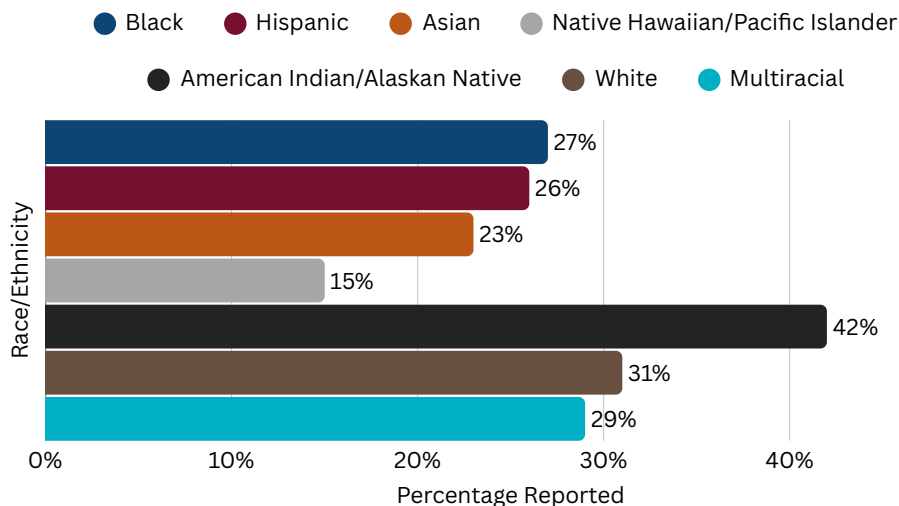
Sleep Disruption



Daily Life Interference

House Bill 1481, effective June 20, 2025, requires Texas public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to prohibit student use of personal communication devices—including cell phones, tablets, and smartwatches—on school property during the school day, with specified exceptions for educational plans, documented medical needs, and health or safety requirements.⁹

Poor Mental Health Reported by U.S. Adolescents in 2023, by Race/Ethnicity¹⁰⁻¹¹



- 29% of U.S. high school students reported poor mental health in 2023.¹⁰
- By gender, 39% of female students and 19% of male students reported poor mental health.¹⁰
- Poor mental health includes stress, anxiety, and depression reported most of the time or always in the past 30 days.¹⁰

Social Media Use

Parental guidance and developmentally appropriate digital literacy remain important to keep children and adolescents safe online.

Percentage of adolescents (ages 13-17) reporting using social platforms more than once per day:¹²

YouTube

54%



TikTok

50%



Instagram

40%



Snapchat

40%



Facebook

13%



- Platform use begins before many adolescents reach the stated minimum age for major platforms.
- Increased social media use is associated with a higher risk of depression and anxiety.⁶

63.8%

of adolescents **under age 13** report having a social media account¹³

Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish device-free sleep as a state health priority.** Nighttime device use can interfere with sleep and adolescent well-being. DSHS and TEA should promote consistent device-free bedtime routines, including charging devices outside the bedroom.
2. **Support effective implementation of device-free school policies.** Limiting personal device use during the school day can reduce distractions and create more opportunities for in-person interaction. TEA should support schools in consistently implementing HB 1481 while maintaining purposeful use of technology for learning.
3. **Strengthen digital and media literacy.** Adolescents need skills to recognize harmful content, navigate social media safely, and develop healthy digital habits. TEA should strengthen age-appropriate digital and media literacy instruction across grade levels.
4. **Give families practical guidance for healthy technology use.** Parents and caregivers play an important role in establishing healthy technology routines. DSHS and TEA should provide practical guidance addressing screen time, social media, nighttime device use, and technology-free activities.

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