

Is the Teen Mental Health Crisis a Spiritual Crisis?

Ask any TikTok user about the app's "For You" Page, and many will say that it ["knows them better than they know themselves."](#) Between its manipulative technology and connection to the Chinese Communist Party, it's unclear how much damage TikTok is doing to American society. We do know, however, that teen depression is skyrocketing, and studies show that an addiction to social media is often to blame.

TikTok continues to feed teens in the U.S. targeted videos through its [sophisticated algorithm and design](#). Instead of helping to improve teen outcomes, it seems to drive them further into themselves or online communities at the expense of their mental health.

Social media companies like TikTok must be held accountable.

In February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released its [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), which measured the health and well-being of high schoolers by looking at survey data from 2011 to 2021. The study revealed some horrifying trends, particularly for females and LGBTQ+ students.

In 2021, 57% [of female high schoolers](#) reported "persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness" (an increase from 36% in 2011). Among LGBTQ+ youth in 2021, the number was a startling 69%. And 29% of males reported such feelings in 2021 (an increase from 21% in 2011).

The report attributes the problem to several reasons like [social media](#), [pandemic-related isolation](#), and political turmoil. Social media certainly plays a large role in the decline in teen mental health. But what can improve these statistics and get kids off the internet and into meaningful relationships?

The study doesn't look at positive impacts on mental well-being, but thankfully, countless others do. Their research points to church membership and involvement as one of the most important indicators of mental well-being.

For example, [Gallup's research confirms](#) the "correlation between [an] individuals' personal religiosity and various measures of wellbeing, happiness and mental (and, in some instances, physical) health." Yet church attendance has plummeted in the U.S. for decades, with the steepest decline being since 2000. More and more parents are raising children in secular home environments.

From 2000 to 2020 alone, church membership among married adults [dropped 13%](#). A staggering [26% fewer U.S. adults](#) belong to a church today than in the 1940s. In 2021, [29% self-described as having "no religion,"](#) according to the Pew Research Center.

Humans are social beings that find their place through the people and institutions around them. If we don't look to religion to understand ourselves, we will look to lesser things. Countless studies confirm the [positive effect of religiosity](#) on mental health. Yet our culture encourages people to "live their truth," whatever that means. It seems like much of this mental health crisis is ultimately a spiritual crisis.

Sincere belief in one's identity as a child of God is a powerful source of identity—one that many of today's youth don't have. At an age when big questions about identity begin to surface, American culture tells teens to define their own. Their lack of a religious foundation leaves today's youth more vulnerable to confusion and suffering.

Instead of the church, teens search for their identity in a setting that profits from insecurity: social media. High school students spend [almost eight hours](#) per day using the

internet for nonacademic purposes. Teens spend much of that time on social media platforms designed to addict their users.

Social media usage has risen precipitously since the [early 2010s](#). According to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, "persistent sadness and hopelessness" climbed each year in the same timespan. Research often shows girls tend to suffer from social media [more than boys](#), which corresponds to the survey.

If anyone thought that the digital world was helping kids thrive, the survey shows that it can potentially be leading to their ruin. The online world cannot replace active [involvement in a local church](#) when it comes to the mental and emotional health of teens.

The survey sheds light on the urgent situation facing today's high schoolers. A holistic solution involves understanding that to thrive, all aspects of a teen's life must be in good health. American high schoolers might smoke less and graduate at higher rates, but that's just one piece of the puzzle. To achieve well-being, teens need a strong identity rooted in something greater than themselves. Religion is essential to this quest.

Parents play a key role in caring for their teens' well-being. Rather than allowing social media to play such a pivotal role in their kids' lives, parents should encourage their children to join communities that have a proven track record: namely, religious participation through a local church. This may not resolve their problems right away, but it could be a promising start.

Parents, consider this a reminder to #deleteTikTok from your kids' phones and use some of the time they would have spent watching videos to take them to church this Sunday.

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