

Social media

We have an expert team to support our students.

Our pastoral care team includes junior and senior deans, specialist guidance counsellors, and youth workers from Kahu Youth and 24-7.



MAC Health Education teacher Carys Overton

In Health Education, we help students understand the connections between social media use and their mental health and wellbeing. We give them the tools they need to support them in developing a positive body image so they can make informed decisions about their use of social media.



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What is social media?

- Social media refers to interactive technologies that enable the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks.
- Examples of social media include Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, Snapchat, Pinterest and LinkedIn.

What we know about social media use

- Today's teens are the first generation to grow up never having known a world without a smartphone.
- There is broad agreement among the scientific community that social media has the potential to both benefit and harm children and adolescents.
- Digital technologies are an important part of young people's everyday life. [A Netsafe survey \(2019\)](#) found that a third of New Zealand teens spend four or more hours online in an average day.
- The same survey also found that 4 in 10 New Zealand teens use five or more social media platforms.

Risks of social media

- A [US Surgeon General's advisory report \(2023\)](#) says social media enables 'extreme, inappropriate and harmful content' to be shared, including content that 'normalizes self-harming, eating disorders and other destructive behaviour.'
- The report goes on to say that social media spaces can be fraught for young people because: 'In early adolescence, when identities and sense of self-worth are forming, brain development is especially susceptible to social pressures, peer opinions, and peer comparison.'
- Research has found that social comparison driven by social media is associated with body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and depressive symptoms.
- The rise in social media has coincided with declines in exercise and sleep, both activities vital to the developing brain.
- A US study found that teenagers who spend more than three hours each day on social media are more likely to develop mental health problems including depression, anxiety, aggression and antisocial behaviour. (*'Associations between time spent using social media and internalizing and externalizing problems among US youth', 2019*).

INFORMATION SHEET

Why social media appeals to young people

- Social media allows young people to form and maintain friendships online, find community, and share information.
- Connections formed on social media can be particularly important for youth who are often marginalised, including racial, ethnic, and sexual and gender minorities.
- Social media can be a way for young people to express themselves creatively.

How we manage use of devices at school

- We recognise that technology has a vital role in teaching and learning, and in our daily lives, and must be used effectively and responsibly.
- Without the distraction of a phone, we believe students are better able to engage in their learning.
- Our '[mobile phones policy](#)' bans personal device use at school and is designed to help students focus on their learning rather than being distracted by their devices.
- We want all our students to feel safe at school, protected from the harmful effects of cyberbullying, and able to fully engage with their friends without the distraction of cell phones in the playground.
- Identity and self-esteem are underlying themes that wind their way through the entirety of our junior health programme at MAC.
- In Health Education, we help students understand the connections between social media use and their mental health and wellbeing. We give them the tools they need to support them in developing a positive body image so they they can make informed decisions about their use of social media.
- Prioritising student wellbeing by building a [safe, caring and inclusive environment](#), is central to our approach in preventing and responding to bullying, including online bullying.

Resources

Netsafe social media advice for parents:

netsafe.org.nz/social-media-parents/

Netsafe Helpline

T: 0508 638 723

E: help@netsafe.org.nz

Tips for parents

- **Talk to your child.** Start a conversation about social media use in a relaxed way during a shared activity. Talk about its risks and benefits, the need to respect their own and others' privacy and personal information.
- **Work with other parents.** Talk to the parents of your child's friends to establish shared practices and boundaries among friendship groups.
- **Encourage device-free time.** Establish set times when all devices are put away such as overnight and during meals and homework time.
- **Model responsible social media behaviour.** Set an example of what responsible and healthy social media use looks like by limiting your own use and modelling positive behaviour online.
- **Be aware of social media age restrictions.** There is a minimum legal age of 13 for Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube.



Our guidance counsellors Victoria Stewart and Holly McDiarmid

How to contact our guidance counsellors

E: dept-guidance@mtaspiring.school.nz

T: 020 404 94623 or 03 443 0496



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