

# Doctors Warn About ‘Facebook Depression’ In Teens

[Lois Rain](#) on March 31, 2011

*In its advent, Facebook, the second highest ranked site on the web, seemed like a godsend. Baby boomers and teens alike can connect and make new friends, create and invite others to events, share pictures and stories, and just “hang out.” It’s only recently that some of the unpleasant complications of its use are coming to light with researchers coining the term “Facebook depression.”*

*Adolescent medicine specialist, Dr. Megan Moreno doesn’t want parents to suddenly think Facebook will infect their teens with depression. Well-adjusted teens seem to thrive using it, whereas teens already prone to depression can deepen depression with its use. It’s not too difficult to see why. Some of the guidelines below indicate that Facebook offers a skewed view of life to teens when they compare their lives to what friends are posting. It has prompted at least one person I know to call it “Fakebook.” Events are often public and mutual friends can see who was invited or excluded. The obsessive gathering of Facebook friends and status “likes” can cause teens to feel even more social pressure than what they experience in high school and junior high. It widens teens’ exposure to cyber bullying and sexting (sending sexual messages or pictures). Although Dr. Gwenn O’Keeffe has posted a half minute, personal YouTube video talking about balance of “plugged and unplugged” activities, there isn’t much else in the American Academy of Pediatrics social media guidelines about significantly limiting Facebook time or encouraging non-cyber activities. They seem to highlight benefits as much as the drawbacks and encourage parents to be aware of their teens’ computer time and talk to them about cyber bullying. Perhaps studies like these will provoke more investigation into self-esteem issues and emotional balance in and out of virtual reality.*

*~Health Freedoms*

CHICAGO (AP) — Add “Facebook depression” to potential harms linked with social media, an influential doctors’ group warns, referring to a condition it says may affect troubled teens who obsess over the online site.

## A NEW CONDITION?

Researchers disagree on whether it’s simply an extension of depression some kids feel in other circumstances, or a distinct condition linked with using the online site.

But there are unique aspects of Facebook that can make it a particularly tough social landscape to navigate for kids already dealing with poor self-esteem, said [Dr. Gwenn O’Keeffe](#), a Boston-area pediatrician and lead author of new [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) social media guidelines. WBZ-TV’s Kate Merrill reports. With in-your-face friends’ tallies, status updates and photos of happy-looking people having great times, Facebook pages can make some kids feel even worse if they think they don’t measure up.

## SKEWED VIEW OF LIFE

It can be more painful than sitting alone in a crowded school cafeteria or other real-life encounters that can make kids feel down, O’Keeffe said, because Facebook provides a skewed view of what’s really going on. Online, there’s no way to see facial expressions or read body language that provide context. The guidelines urge pediatricians to encourage parents to talk with their kids about online use and to be aware of Facebook depression, cyberbullying, sexting and other online risks. They were published online Monday in Pediatrics.

## ‘IT’S LIKE A BIG POPULARITY CONTEST’

Abby Abolt, 16, a [Chicago](#) high school sophomore and frequent Facebook user, says the site has never made her feel depressed, but that she can understand how it might affect some kids. “If you really didn’t have that many friends and weren’t really doing much with your life,

and saw other peoples' status updates and pictures and what they were doing with friends, I could see how that would make them upset," she said.

"It's like a big popularity contest — who can get the most friend requests or get the most pictures tagged," she said. Also, it's common among some teens to post snotty or judgmental messages on the Facebook walls of people they don't like, said Gaby Navarro, 18, a senior from Grayslake, Ill. It's happened to her friends, and she said she could imagine how that could make some teens feel depressed. "Parents should definitely know" about these practices," Navarro said. "It's good to raise awareness about it." The academy guidelines note that online harassment "can cause profound psychosocial outcomes," including suicide. The [widely publicized suicide of a 15-year-old Massachusetts girl](#) last year occurred after she'd been bullied and harassed, in person and on Facebook. "Facebook is where all the teens are hanging out now. It's their corner store," O'Keeffe said. She said the benefits of kids using social media sites like Facebook shouldn't be overlooked, however, such as connecting with friends and family, sharing pictures and exchanging ideas.

'IT CAN GO TOO FAR'

"A lot of what's happening is actually very healthy, but it can go too far," she said.

Dr. Megan Moreno, a [University of Wisconsin](#) adolescent medicine specialist who has studied online social networking among college students, said using Facebook can enhance feelings of social connectedness among well-adjusted kids, and have the opposite effect on those prone to depression. Parents shouldn't get the idea that using Facebook "is going to somehow infect their kids with depression," she said.

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<http://boston.cbslocal.com/2011/03/28/doctors-warn-about-facebook-depression-in-teens/>