

Social Media and Violence

Social media has integrated itself into many aspects of our lives. Whether we use it to bridge friendships, stay informed, or express ourselves, social media offers us a unique way to stay connected with the world around us. However, one does not need to look very far to experience the darker side of social media use. News reports of cyberbullying, gang violence, criminal activity, and suicide fueled by social media is shocking and troubling. The tragic stories of Iquan Williams' murder, Joshua Arrington's shooting and resulting leg amputation, and Rebecca Sedwick's suicide caution us to the serious consequences of harmful social media use.

Harmful social media use does not stay in cyberspace. Often times the ramifications spill into the real world, and what at first seems like an unprovoked event is illuminated by a review of the social media activity that preceded it.

Unfortunately, information on how to respond and prevent harm through social media is not clearly stated or available, and warning signs are left unreported until it's too late. The aim of this curriculum is to help youth recognize and react to harmful social media behavior, and to feel confident in their ability to do so. Whether the solution is to listen to others, actively mediate an argument, or call an anti-violence organization, youth will be given the tools to recognize harmful use and know the options available to help their peers. Violence on social media is a serious problem, but it is one that can be prevented. This curriculum will serve as a positive step towards providing information to youth on how to assist, report, and most importantly, stay safe on social media.

Instructions

The following packet provides tools to discuss healthy social media use with youth and anti-violence staff. While we see unhealthy behavior on the rise across social media users, these tools are designed to discuss violence, harm, and other criminal activities that are broadcasted on social media. These tools are meant to spark discussion, help youth navigate harmful social media use, and provide steps on how to maintain privacy. Also included are tools for anti-violence staff covering how to recognize harmful posts that can result in real world violence and to maintain a professional social media presence. Below is a description of each tool:

- **Responsible Social Media Posting** – This flyer is designed for a general population of adolescent students. It points out a number of harmful behaviors occurring on social media and a variety of coping skills available to them if this situation occurs.
- **Crime and Social Media** – This flyer is designed for youth already involved in gun violence. It identifies usage that can result in arrest or violent retaliation and a variety of coping skills available to them if this situation occurs.
- **Risk for Violence On Social Media** – This flyer identifies the types of communication that amplify, promote, or provoke violence. It also includes a risk assessment strategy to understand how likely the social media content will result in real world violence, along with ways to monitor or intervene with youth once harmful or violent content is identified.
- **Managing Your Social Media Activity for Work** – This tool assists staff in identifying how to maintain their self-expression and social life on social media, while also remaining visible as a respected professional.
- **Privacy Tips**- This flyer provides general tips on how to update privacy settings. Since social media is constantly evolving, this sheet gives suggestions on how to find privacy information, and where this information is most likely located on websites and mobile apps.

- Social Media Timelines – Two timelines are provided to illustrate how social media use influences real world violence. The timelines outline social media posts and violent incidents from two different indictments of six Manhattan crews and the killing of Kierra’onna Rice in Birmingham, Alabama.
- Student Lesson Plan – The 40 minute lesson plan guides youth to identify harmful and violent social media content they witness, experience, or post. This activity is supported by discussing the associated risks for real world violence and exploring actions steps on how to handle such content.
 - News Examples – This document includes short summaries of news articles pertaining to how poor social media use has led to violence, arrests, unemployment, and rejection from college admissions.
 - Harmful Posts Exercise and Key – This handout provides four examples of harmful social media posts, asks students to perform a risk assessment and discuss how they would intervene on the post. The Exercise Key provides answers and further discussion questions on the scenarios.

The Citizens Crime Commission of New York City has identified several life skills needed to encourage healthy social media behavior, including empathy and grieving. These concepts are covered in detailed “How To Guides” provided below for leaders interested in addressing these concerns further with their participants, students, and peers. These guides outline and define the topic, explain why they are important, how they are relevant to social media use, and how to promote and build these healthy life skills.

- Empathy How-to Guide
- Grief How-to Guide