

CASE SCENARIO FOR PROVIDERS

SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Medical Appointment with Julia (17)

Pediatric and adolescent providers can integrate conversations about media use into health consultations with increased confidence knowing that their acknowledgement and guidance can have a positive influence on youth and families. A healthy relationship with a trusted adult is a protective factor for youth mental health, and many youth trust health care providers' expertise.¹ Talk about digital media in the spirit of health and wellness, not judgment and control. Engage with youth and their caregivers by demonstrating curiosity and offering your partnership.²



TIP: Submit any questions you have to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [Center for Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health Q&A Portal](#) for a personalized and evidence-based response. Patients can also look to the portal for additional support outside of the office.

The [AAP's policy statement](#) on media use offers some key recommendations for pediatricians.

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational Interviewing is a specific method of talking with people about change and growth to strengthen their own motivation and commitment. This evidence-based process is grounded in research about what makes conversations more or less helpful, allowing others to explore change more comfortably. Relational skills include demonstrating compassion, acceptance, partnership and empowerment. Technical skills include asking open-ended questions and using reflective listening statements. Because change is a process and rarely a straight line, the discussion moves like a dance and takes into consideration the person's values, beliefs, age, culture and social structures.

Julia is 17 years old and a junior in high school. She shared that she's been having trouble in school and is spending a lot of time on social media. After hearing this, the provider takes this opportunity to begin a conversation about social media.



Provider: Thank you for sharing some of your concerns with me. If you're open to it, I'd like to hear more from you and maybe we can create a plan together from there. How does that sound? (**Partnership, Open Question**)

Julia: Yeah, that sounds good.



Provider: What do you like about social media? (**Partnership, Open Question**)

Julia: I mainly watch videos on TikTok — comedy skits or dance videos. It's a vibe, you know? It gives me a break from thinking about school.



Provider: It sounds like you're looking for ways to manage your stress while getting some entertainment and laughs. (**Reflection**)

Julia: Yeah, but I end up scrolling for hours. It starts out helpful, but then I get stuck in a loop.



Provider: You're aware that it becomes less helpful over time. You aren't alone in that feeling! I hear similar thoughts from other young patients — and notice it myself as well. How do you pull yourself away? (**Reflection, Acceptance, Open Question**)

Julia: Usually, I notice it's really late and I need to sleep, or that I still have homework to do. Then I get stressed all over again.



Provider: It's great that you're noticing how scrolling affects your time and stress levels. Scrolling as a form of entertainment is not inherently bad, and there is a balance for what works best for you. We don't want it to end up adding to your stress or crowding out sleep – which it sounds like it may be doing. **(Affirmation, Compassion)**

Julia: For sure. I'm just not sure what to do.



Provider: When you think about ways to feel less stressed, what activities come to mind that work for you? **(Evocation, Open Question)**

Julia: I like to go outside for a walk sometimes. Walking our dog used to be my chore, but my mom took over doing it when I got busier with school.



Provider: Getting outside can be great for relieving stress. It can even help you reset and focus on those things you need to get done – like homework. How do you think taking a walk might help you feel differently about your stress? **(Affirmation, Reflection, Open Question)**

Julia: I think it might help me feel a little less stressed. Maybe I could go on a walk after school with my dog, then start my homework. I'm not sure how to stop scrolling late at night, though.



Provider: A walk after school sounds like a great first step. And letting your mom know you are walking the dog could be a good way to hold yourself accountable for getting outside. Are you open to some settings and options you can consider for your phone for evenings? **(Affirmation, Exchange of Information)**

Julia: Oh, sure. Sometimes I delete TikTok but it's so easy to redownload.



Provider: Great! There are a few easy things you can try that don't require you to delete it entirely, such as setting time limits for certain apps, setting an alarm in case you lose track of time, moving your charger to a different room at night, or turning your phone to "do not disturb" during certain times of day. You might also consider planning for more activities, like walks, that you know will help you feel good, so you have options beyond your phone and social media. How does this feel? What questions do you have about the settings? **(Open Questions)**

Julia: This feels like a good start. I don't have any questions; I know how to change my phone settings!



Provider: I'm glad. What other activities could you plan ahead of time? **(Open Question)**

Julia: Other than the walks, I might try calling a friend to work on homework together and then I could try reading in the evening, so I have something to do before going to sleep.



Provider: Sounds like an excellent plan. Let's check back in to see which options work best for you when we meet next. **(Affirmation, Partnership)**

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS:



1. How did the provider build partnership?
2. What can empowerment look like between a provider and a youth patient?
3. Where is there room for acceptance and choice in conversations like these?
4. What would you do differently in this interaction to support growth and change?
5. What cues from this client gave you the sense she was engaged?
6. Rather than focusing on limiting social media use, it can be helpful for teens to think about what activities they want to prioritize and spend more time on. How can you gather information about what your teen clients care about and encourage them to make decisions based on those values?

Social Media and Middle Adolescence: What Should Be on Your Radar:

As an adolescent's drive for independence becomes stronger, there may be increases in parent-teen conflict. Teens have more choices and independence around the media content they choose, which may be content that is quite different than what they had seen as a child.

Media use can be a part of healthy and normal adolescent development, communication, and peer relationship building. This can also be a time in which peer relationships can endure rocky times and challenging situations, some of which can be worsened by digital communications.

For some teens, middle adolescence can be a time of intense pressure for conformity. This pressure, combined with the tendency of middle adolescent-age youth to see themselves as unbreakable, can lead to participation in risky behavior.



RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

Visit the [AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health website](#) and check out the following resources for more information and tools:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [Using Motivational Interviewing to Discuss Family Media Habits](#)
- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [Talking Points for Media Use Based on Parent/Child Concerns](#)
- **Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers:** [Understanding Motivational Interviewing](#)
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing:** [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#)

Resources for providers and parents:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [The 5 Cs of Media Use](#)
- **HealthyChildren.org:** [Family Media Plan](#)

The following resources can be shared directly with parents and youth:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:**
 - » [Conversation Starters for Families About Media](#)
 - » [Family Social Media Tip Sheet](#)
 - » [Glossary of Digital Media Platforms](#)
 - » [Social Media: Enjoy the Upsides and Avoid the Downsides](#)
 - » [Social Media Tips for Teens](#)
- **Crisis Lines:**
 - » [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#) is a 24/7 treatment referral and information service.
 - » [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) offers 24/7, confidential support for people in distress.
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing:**
 - » [Youth Hub](#)

REFERENCES

1. Snell, A. & Kline, J. (2022, July-October). Findings from an online assessment of youth ages 13-18 years old [Unpublished internal document]. Commissioned from Lake Research Partners by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.
2. Moreno, M.A., Klein, J.D., Kaseeska, K., Gorzkowski, J., Harris, D., Davis, J., Gotlieb, E., & Wasserman, R. (2023). A cluster randomized controlled trial of a primary care provider-delivered social media counseling intervention. *Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 73(5), 924-930. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.06.007>

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