

Common Sense Advocacy

Common Sense Media, an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit, is the nation's leading organization dedicated to giving kids, families, and educators the tools to make informed choices about media and technology. Families know us for our independent, age-based reviews of movies, TV shows, podcasts, books, games, and apps. Educators use our free curriculum and reviews of learning products to plan lessons and integrate technology in the classroom. Our Digital Citizenship curriculum is used by 1.2 million teachers in 87,000 U.S. schools, including over 70% of Title I schools. At our core, we are a children's advocacy group. We work alongside people and organizations who care about kids as much as we do. Together with our partners, we advocate for policies that help all families thrive.

Policy Issue Areas

ACCOUNTABILITY | Social media companies are responsible for the effect their products have on kids and lawmakers have to force them to make changes to protect their users. **In the absence of congressional action, states are playing the lead role in online safety regulations. States should:**

- Require companies to design platforms in a way that prioritizes kids' and teens' health and well-being over engagement and profits.
- Require that the strongest privacy-protective settings be the default for minors.
- Prohibit design features (e.g., use of addictive feeds, constant notifications, autoplay, and endless scroll) that manipulate minors to spend more time online.

PRIVACY | Reducing the collection and sharing of minors' data will limit kids' exposure to unwanted content and features harmful to their well-being. **State privacy laws should specifically enhance online privacy protections for kids and teens, including but not limited to:**

- Establish an opt-in data collection regime for minors.
- Expand outdated federal online protections for teens ages 13 to 17.
- Ban targeted advertising to kids and teens.
- Restrict the collection and selling of minors' data.
- Guarantee minors the right to access, correct, and erase their personal data.

DIGITAL EQUITY | Efforts to expand the availability of high-quality media for kids and teens are only valuable if they have the means and ability to access it. **States should build upon federal investments to promote universal access to affordable internet and digital inclusion support through:**

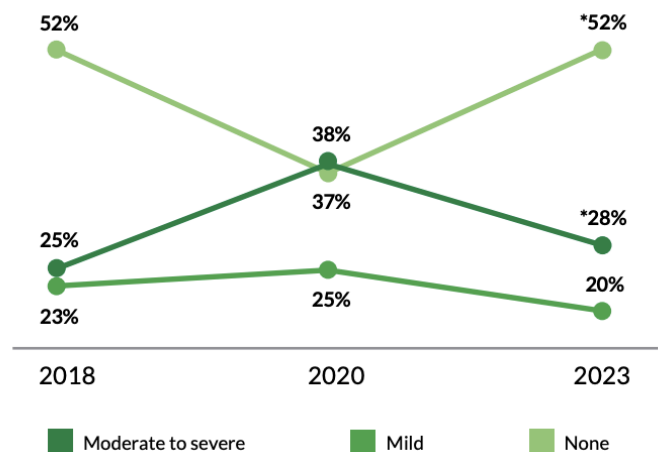
- Support broadband affordability through a state-led internet subsidy program, as proposed in Pennsylvania and New York. States can model program offerings and eligibility based on the Emergency Connectivity Fund or the Affordable Connectivity Program.
- Institute regular digital needs assessments through anchor institutions, such as libraries and schools. Consider including additional questions in existing state surveys to track the status of digital needs across the state.
- Support and promote digital literacy and digital citizenship resources through anchor institutions. Incorporate digital skills into statewide K-12 education standards and teacher professional development requirements.
- Promote and support Capacity and Competitive grant applications among local education agencies and their eligible anchor institutions.

Tech & Youth Mental Health | While our research shows that rates of depressive symptoms in young people have returned to pre-pandemic levels, many still struggle to find in-person care, support, and practical information for their behavioral health challenges. Telehealth and online apps play a crucial role in meeting unmet needs; however, there remains a need to ensure that the quality of services provided through these platforms is comparable to offline alternatives.

For many kids and teens, especially those from marginalized communities, social media serves as a crucial avenue for connectivity, news, and inspiration, but it also poses serious threats and real harms. Policymakers must support changes aimed at enhancing internet safety, privacy, and accessibility.

Depressive symptoms are down from pandemic highs, but comparable to 2018 levels

% of young people age 14–22, by year of data collection and by depressive symptoms



Interested in learning more? Explore Common Sense Media reports and resources:



- [How Young People Find, Evaluate, and Use Online Mental Health Tools](#) (June 2024)
- [A Double-Edged Sword: Social Media and Mental Health](#) (May 2024)
- [The State of Kids and Families in America 2024](#) (January 2024)
- [Constant Companion: Teens' Smartphone Use](#) (September 2023)
- [2023 State of Kids' Privacy](#) (June 2023)
- [Teens and Mental Health: How Girls Feel About Social Media](#) (March 2023)

Questions? Contact Brenna Leasor, Tech Policy Counsel – bleasor@commonsense.org

Common Sense is dedicated to improving the lives of children in the complex digital world by providing trustworthy information, education, and an independent voice to help families and teachers navigate the media and technology landscape. With a focus on children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development, Common Sense collaborates with policymakers, industry leaders, and parents to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a digital world. www.commonsense.org