

## Social Media is 'Tearing Us Apart', Middle and High School Students Say

By [Alyson Klein](#) on January 23, 2020 1:48 PM

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The digital world isn't just exhausting for adults. More than half of the middle and high school students who participated in a recent survey say they sometimes turn off their phones just to get some relief from all the activity, even though they then feel disconnected. And more than half of U.S. students surveyed—56 percent—say technology and social media are "tearing us apart more than they are bringing people together."

That's according to results from a series of polls spearheaded by Common Sense Media, a nonprofit in San Francisco that studies the impact of technology on young people, and Kahoot!, a learning games platform. The surveys were hosted by teachers in 219,754 sessions, engaging 457,330 middle and high school students from around the world. The questions were intended to get class discussion going, and give teachers insights on how their students view social media. But some of the results are striking.

For instance:

- About a quarter of U.S. students who took the survey agreed with the statement, "When you're hanging out with friends, it's okay for everyone to be on their phones," while about 60 percent disagreed. And a third of students said that if you "don't want to text someone anymore, it's okay to just ghost them," compared with more than half who disagreed with that statement.
- More than half of U.S. students surveyed—nearly 54 percent—said social media is a good place to stay up-to-date on the world's news, while about a quarter disagreed.
- Nearly a third of U.S. students—31 percent—said it was okay to share something on social media, even if it's not true, if it is funny and you like what it says.
- Just under 43 percent of students surveyed in the U.S. said that when you find "mean, hateful, or abusive content" online, it's best to ignore it. Roughly the same percentage disagreed. And more than a third agreed with the idea that "people should accept that seeing offensive or threatening content is just a part of being online," while half of students disagreed with that idea.
- About 80 percent of U.S. students in the survey said that "some people think too much about their social media posts, and are always trying to be perfect," while just over 10 percent disagreed with that idea. And about a third said that it was "okay to post a version of yourself on social media that's not 100 percent real."

The findings on the surveys were intended to spark conversation on digital citizenship. Jason Gay, a media specialist at Highland High School in Fort Thomas, Ky., said it allowed him to "meet kids on their terms." And he was able to learn a bit more about the stresses social media bring on his students.

"There is a whole side of meme culture and joke culture that as adults is a really tough thing for us to understand," he said. Students "are so used to that world where everything is all the time being pumped out" online, and they rarely catch a break from it, the way that many now-adults did when they were in high school and social interactions were largely confined to the school day.

Ruben Valenzuela, eighth grade social studies teacher at Sanchez Middle School in El Paso, Texas, also used the quizzes, and accompanying lessons from Common Sense, to talk to his students about how social media is impacting their interactions with peers.

"They agreed that when they are hanging out with a group of friends, pretty much everyone is on their phone," he said, even if they are just interacting with other people in the room. "A lot of them said they'll talk to one hundred of their classmates on social media, but in real life as they are passing in the hallway, they won't talk to each other."

The reason? Sometimes it just feels easier to talk to someone through the safety of a screen. "It gives them time to think about their responses," he said. "Students say it's easier to cope with rejection. They all agree they can't live without their phone."

Image: Getty

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**RoY** • 7 hours ago

first, you should be telling 'middle' school students what to think and how to act, not surveying their mushy little mind attitudes. where are the adults in the room ??

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**EduMich** → **RoY** • 5 hours ago

Ha!

Good luck with that!

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



**TCR** → **RoY** • 3 hours ago

Are you an educator? If you are, I'm concerned that you think this is a viable approach to educating young people.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



**jsunma** • 6 hours ago

It would be very helpful if the EdWeek author would provide a citation for the full survey report. I've been to Common Sense's site and cannot find a current research report (i.e., something from less than a year ago) which seems to include this research. Without a citation, this