

# Blogging may help teens dealing with social distress

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Blogging may have psychological benefits for teens suffering from social anxiety, improving their self-esteem and helping them relate better to their friends, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

"Research has shown that writing a personal diary and other forms of expressive writing are a great way to release [emotional distress](#) and just feel better," said the study's lead author, Meyran Boniel-Nissim, PhD, of the University of Haifa, Israel. "Teens are online anyway, so blogging enables free expression and easy communication with others."

Maintaining a blog had a stronger positive effect on troubled students' well-being than merely expressing their social anxieties and concerns in a private diary, according to the article published online in the APA journal *Psychological Services*. Opening the blog up to comments from the online community intensified those effects.

"Although [cyberbullying](#) and online abuse are extensive and broad, we noted that almost all responses to our participants' blog messages were supportive and positive in nature," said the study's co-author, Azy Barak, PhD. "We weren't surprised, as we frequently see positive social expressions online in terms of generosity, support and advice."

The researchers randomly surveyed [high school students](#) in Israel, who had agreed to fill out a questionnaire about their feelings on the quality of their [social relationships](#). A total of 161 students -- 124 girls and 37

boys, with an average age of 15 -- were selected because their scores on the survey showed they all had some level of [social anxiety](#) or distress. All the teens reported difficulty making friends or relating to the friends they had. The researchers assessed the teens' self-esteem, everyday social activities and behaviors before, immediately after and two months after the 10-week experiment.

Four groups of students were assigned to blog. Two of those groups were told to focus their posts on their social problems, with one group opening the posts to comments; the other two groups could write about whatever they wanted and, again, one group opened the blog up to comments. The number and content of comments were not evaluated for this experiment. The students could respond to comments but that was not required. Two more groups acted as controls – either writing a private diary about their social problems or doing nothing. Participants in the writing and blogging groups were told to post messages at least twice a week for 10 weeks.

Four experts, who held master's or doctoral degrees in counseling and psychology, assessed the bloggers' social and emotional condition via their blog posts. Students were assessed as having a poor social and emotional state if they wrote extensively about personal problems or bad relationships or showed evidence of low self-esteem, for example.

Self-esteem, social anxiety, emotional distress and the number of positive social behaviors improved significantly for the bloggers when compared to the teens who did nothing and those who wrote private diaries. Bloggers who were instructed to write specifically about their difficulties and whose blogs were open to comments improved the most. All of these results were consistent at the two month follow-up.

The authors conceded that the skewed sex ratio was a limitation to the study. However, the researchers analyzed the results separately by gender

and found that boys and girls reacted similarly to the interventions and there were no major differences. However, they say future research should attempt to control for gender.

**More information:** "The Therapeutic Value of Adolescents' Blogging About Social-Emotional Difficulties," Meyran Boniel-Nissim, PhD, and Azy Barak, PhD, University of Haifa; Psychological Services, Online Dec. 21.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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