

# Parents underestimate teens' social media use during pandemic

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Parents' and adolescents' estimates of adolescent screen use during the first year of the pandemic differed significantly, according to a new study published in *Academic Pediatrics*. While parents estimated their children spent more total time using screens recreationally than their kids estimated, parents underestimated the amount of time spent specifically on social media and multi-player video games (versus

texting, video chats, and other uses).

"Although most [parents](#) and their teens spent more time together at home during the pandemic, this did not translate to a greater awareness of their child's screen use," said lead author Jason Nagata, MD, assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco.

The study also found that parents underestimated girls' more than boys' [social media](#) use. Research suggests social media can have a detrimental impact on teenage girls' [body image](#) and mental health, which has been the subject of recent Senate hearings.

"A negative body image may be a result of exposure to social media and unattainable body ideals," said study co-author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "This may lead to disordered eating behaviors and poor [mental health](#)."

The study also found larger discrepancies in family estimates of social media use in families of color, with single parents, and with low income.

Previous studies have shown recreational screen time [doubled](#) among teens during the pandemic, Dr. Nagata noted. "Parents should discuss screen use with their teens and develop a family media use plan," he said. "Discussions about time spent on screens, as well as types of screen use and content, may promote greater understanding among family members and help prevent adverse consequences."

**More information:** Jason M. Nagata et al, Parent-adolescent discrepancies in adolescent recreational screen time reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Academic Pediatrics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.acap.2021.12.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2021.12.008)

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