HEALTHY LEARNERS
A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

Strengthening Youth
Mental Health...

more exploring, less scrolling

As we keep discussing the teen mental health crisis, it's important to both look at contributing factors and provide concrete steps we can take to help our young people.

In May of this year, the Surgeon General issued an advisory about the effects of social media on youth mental health. Up to 95% of teenagers and 40% of children ages 8-12 use social media. Concerns include excessive use to the point of addiction, sleep disruptions, negative effects on body-image, exposure to hate based content, and bullying: all of this during a vulnerable period of brain development.

Psychology professor Jon Haidt proposes that to understand the youth mental health crisis, we need to also look at how childhood play has changed in the last few decades. "The central idea of my forthcoming book, ***The Anxious Generation***, is that we have overprotected children in the real world, where they need a lot of free play and autonomy, while under protecting them online, where they are not developmentally ready for much of what happens to them." ***Play Deprivation Is A Major Cause of the Teen Mental Health Crisis***. As a society, we have moved from children going outside to explore and play with neighbors and friends to planned and supervised play dates, less recess, and highly organized afterschool activities. Through free play and independent activities without adult interference, children learn to solve problems, interact socially with peers, and regulate emotions.

Just like a healthy body, development of a healthy mind requires healthy habits in a nurturing environment. There is much we can do as caring adults to act as protective factors for the healthy development of our children's minds. **For tips to create free play opportunities for young children as well as a plan for healthy social media use for youth click on the links below.**

"Here's to a healthy school year for our children both in body and mind!" - Aixa Rodriguez-Mariani, MD

Mental Health is Health