

Addressing social comparison concerns

The California Partners Project is engaged in a statewide listening tour with mothers, parents, and caregivers to understand how they are navigating the integration of technology and devices into most aspects of their children's lives.

A mom in Northern California shared her concern that "a lot of kids measure their importance based on the number of followers or likes they get" on their social media accounts. "They are measuring their success based on the number of followers they have." This mom explains that she tells her kids "Your social media presence does not define you and there is more to you than just you behind the screen."

Social comparison occurs when an individual determines their self-worth by judging oneself against others. It can be exacerbated through social media; today's youth find connection and meaning through the likes and comments built into social media. According to UCSF Professor of Pediatrics [Dr. Jason Nagata](#), "More time on social media can lead to more comparisons to peers. This may also lead to exposure to unattainable body ideals and higher dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Social media use is linked to higher risk of developing eating disorders." While social media can be a source of connection, Dr. Suniya Luthar has conducted research showing online social comparison is a risk factor, over and above many others, for depression and anxiety in teens. ([Adversity and Resilience Sci 1, 135-147 2020](#))

Tips to address social comparison concerns

TIP 1: Find ways to emphasize strengths and skills over image.

The Child Mind Institute recommends that youth have "many sources of self-esteem." Especially for young women, make sure to compliment your child on what she does and her effort, not just her appearance. Highlight your child's strengths and abilities and support their interests. ([Child Mind Institute](#))

TIP 2: Role model authentic connections for yourself and facilitate this type of connection with your child.

Psychologist [Dr. Suniya Luthar](#), founder of the nonprofit [AC Groups](#), reminds us that "kids do what they see and not what you say to them. Demonstrate the power of your own sustaining relationships and your own sense of self-worth. Help your child feel unconditionally accepted. Your child will be protected from the potential negative impact of online social comparison if they feel they have a trusted adult who loves them and sees them for who they really are."

TIP 3: Encourage critical thinking through conversation and observation.

Psychologist [Dr. Pamela Rutledge](#), Director of the [Media Psychology Research Center](#), suggests youth keep a diary for one week documenting how they feel while using social media. This will help them be more mindful of their activities and feelings. Parents should also complete a diary to enrich the conversation and encourage future connection. Help youth see the role of influencers in defining what is desirable. Try to understand what it is about "likes" or a post that is impacting your child; create space for them to share their inner dialogue (self-talk).

TIP 4: Suggest an experiment.

Some social media apps allow users to turn off the "like" function. If you notice your child may benefit from a break, Dr. Pamela Rutledge suggests a parent ask, "what would it be like to turn off the likes or image filters?" and recommend a trial period to test out how it feels not to track likes or filter images.