



Supporting Your Teen After Exposure to Distressing Online Content

Young people may encounter upsetting, frightening, or traumatic content through social media - sometimes unexpectedly and sometimes involving someone they know. Reactions vary: some teens want to talk immediately, while others may seem unaffected at first and react later.

Start the Conversation

Let your teen know you are available without pressuring them to talk. You might say:

"I heard that some students may have seen something upsetting online. I wanted to check in and see how you are doing."

You do not need to ask your teen to show you the content or describe it in detail. Let them share as much or as little as they want. Repeatedly viewing or recounting disturbing material may increase distress.

Encourage Them Not to Rewatch or Share It

Encourage your teen not to repost, forward, screen-record, or show distressing content to others. If it continues appearing in their feed, they can mute, block, report, or take a temporary break from the platform.

Help With "What If?" and Feelings of Guilt

After a traumatic event, teens may think: *"Should I have known?" "Could I have done something?" "Why didn't I realize what that meant?"* Remind them that information can look very different **after we know what happened** than it did in the moment. Listen without arguing with their feelings. If guilt or responsibility is weighing heavily on them, connect them with a school counselor or mental-health professional.

Watch for Changes

- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, or repeated upsetting thoughts/images
- Increased anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, irritability, or trouble concentrating
- Withdrawal from friends, family, activities, or school
- Repeatedly watching, searching for, or talking about the content
- Significant changes in eating, sleeping, substance use, or other risky behavior
- Persistent guilt or a sense of responsibility
- Talking about hopelessness, death, suicide, or not wanting to be here

Some temporary changes can be normal after a frightening experience. **Persistent, worsening, or concerning changes are a reason to seek additional support.**

Maintain Routine and Connection

Normal routines can provide reassurance. Encourage sleep, regular meals, physical activity, time away from social media, and connection with trusted friends and adults. Your teen may also need some flexibility while processing what happened.

If You're Concerned About Your Teen

Reach out to your child's school counselor, pediatrician, or mental-health provider. If your teen talks about suicide, wanting to die, or not wanting to be here, take it seriously and seek support.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 for 24/7 crisis support.

If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.