

Engaging with Youth on Social Media

WHY use social media to engage youth

Teens use social media all the time, and it is in the best interest of youth-serving health care practices to have an online presence as well. Health centers with enhanced youth programming may have different goals and resources for how they utilize social media than health centers with a limited focus on youth. Social media and other online platforms (such as an up-to-date website) can improve health care outcomes for patients by providing them with health messages or identifying locations where they can receive youth-friendly services.

Research shows that most teens have accessed health information online, and some teens report changing their behavior due to that health information. Additionally, having a social media presence can be seen as a sign of legitimacy and increases the awareness of your practice, potentially resulting in greater utilization of services.

STRATEGIES to engage with youth on social media

Think strategically about what outcomes you want to achieve from your social media presence

- Determine if you want to share health messages with an existing patient group, attract new ones, increase the visibility of your organization, respond to emerging health trends, or drive advocacy about a particular health issue.
- Find out how your adolescent patients use social media. With your desired outcome(s) in mind, survey your patients or partner with a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to find out what social media platforms they use and which platforms they would like to see their health center use. Ask them about how they would be interested in engaging with their health center through social media.
- Make sure you check in with youth periodically, as preferred social media platforms, and ways in which they would want to engage with their health center will change with time.

Create a Digital Media Policy

- A social media policy should be added to other human resources policies.
- The policy should include guidelines for your branded materials and should specify which employees have access to the accounts (and what happens to that access if an employee leaves your organization), approval processes, and strategic goals of use. It should also cover employees' use of personal social media accounts and specify whether staff are allowed to mention their affiliation in their profiles or encouraged to follow the organization.
- Set expectations for employees' interaction with youth they might work with professionally (i.e., a youth group advisor may accept a "friend" request from a young person once he or she is no longer a member of the group, but not while they are a participant).
- There are various sample policies to consult, such as this [UCSF policy](#)¹ for personal accounts. The [Social Media Policy Tool](#)² allows you to choose parameters then generates a social media policy, customized for your organization.

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Identify staff responsible for maintaining an active social media presence

- Ensure that this staff member has time built into their schedule to maintain the level of social media activity that you want for your center.
- They should be familiar with the different practices of social media platforms. The type of content and frequency of posts varies by platform; see this [cheat sheet](#)³ from Social Media Week for suggestions.
- The staff member(s) responsible for creating the social media posts should have extensive familiarity with both the social media policy and other organization-level practices to protect patient privacy.

Engage regularly and authentically with your audience

- Keep up with whatever platform you choose, and engage with your audience at a frequency that matches your platform. For example, some experts recommend posting content at least once a day on Facebook, and multiple times per day on Twitter for organizations that want to have a robust and interactive presence.
- Showing real interest or emotion about a topic, or speaking to something that your center does well, is more important than sounding polished. For example, you can increase engagement with your posts by including short narratives or human interest stories along with a health education message.
- Make sure that what you're posting aligns with your health center's values and population. For example, if you post images of youth, make sure those images reflect a variety of ethnic backgrounds, gender expressions, and ability statuses.

Expect engagement to take time

- Expect to have a lower level of engagement with your adolescent patients than you will with other age groups. Young people may not want to follow you, and that's okay! Simply seeing that your health center has a social media presence can make your organization appear more legitimate to many teens.
- Work with a youth council to build engagement. They can help write posts, take pictures, or even do a "guest takeover" of your platform for a day. An example of a youth-informed campaign is the [Generation Indigenous \(Gen-I\) initiative](#).⁴

Additional RESOURCES

- Review resources for developing social media content in this free [toolkit](#)⁵ from Skills for Health.
- The CDC's [Guide to Writing for Social Media](#)⁶ includes a comprehensive checklist of best practices for each platform.
- [Download](#)⁷ a free manual to establish and sustain a Youth Advisory Council.
- Review the Family and Youth Services Bureau publication [on Community Saturation Sourcebook: A Field Guide for Youth-Serving Program Providers](#).⁸
- Consider this blog post from Hootsuite: [Social Media in Health Care: The Benefits, Challenges, and Opportunities](#).⁹

SAMPLE POSTS

These are a few examples of some successful social media campaigns. A social media campaign is an ongoing series of posts about a certain issue, and can spread across multiple media outlets or platforms, or just be a recurring theme on one site. You know your patient population best – engage with them and seek their input. You might also take part in national campaigns, such as National Eating Disorder Week, or days of action, like the Great American Smokeout.

- a. [Humans of the Corner](#)¹⁰, from the Corner Health Center:



- b. Sample post from [IknowUshould2](#)¹¹:



¹<https://www.ucsf.edu/about/social-media-overview/social-media-best-practices>

²<http://socialmedia.policytool.net/>

³<https://socialmediaweek.org/blog/2016/03/optimize-social-media-time/>

⁴<http://www.npaihb.org/social-marketing-campaigns/#1474929295947-40082ac6-ed94>

⁵<http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/socialtoolkit>

⁶<https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/guidetowritingforsocialmedia.pdf>

⁷<http://www.umhs-adolescenthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/manual-for-website.pdf>

⁸<https://teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov/resources/community-saturation-sourcebook-field-plan-youth-serving-program-providers>

⁹<https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-health-care/>

¹⁰https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/humansofthecorner?source=feed_text

¹¹https://www.facebook.com/pg/iknowushould2/posts/?ref=page_internal