

Youth Social Media Use and Impacts in Utah

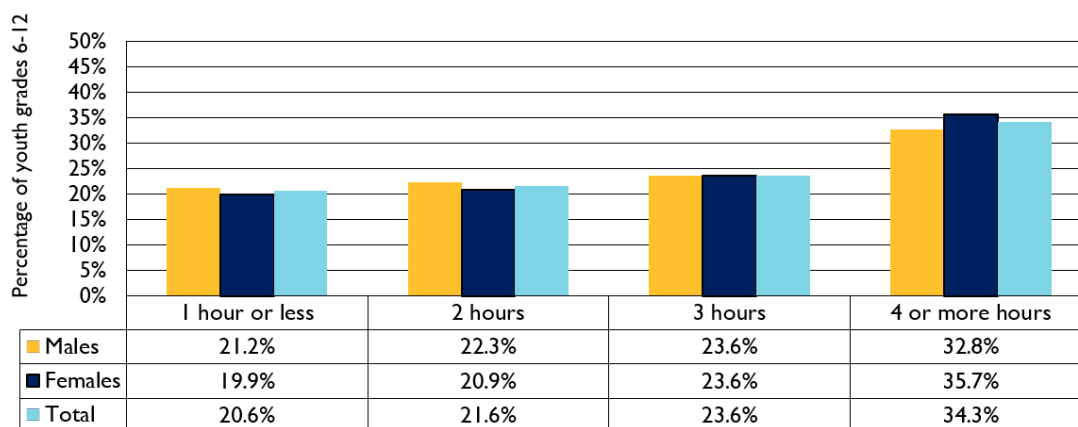
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The Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Survey measures a variety of substance use and health-related behaviors among Utah's youth population. This provides critical information about the health and wellness of Utah's youth to state and local-level substance misuse prevention and health promotion professionals, parents, school district staff, and community prevention coalitions. The SHARP Survey is administered every other school year to youth in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12, and typically samples between 45,000 and 90,000 youth. The 2025 SHARP Survey was the 12th administration of the survey and had a sample size of over 75,000. This data brief highlights data collected in 2025 to better understand the use of electronic devices and social media by youth in Utah.

Electronic device and mobile phone use

How often do youth in Utah use electronic devices and mobile phones? The SHARP Survey provides important insight regarding this question (Figure 1). Youth (in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) were asked, "On an average school day, how many hours do you use an electronic device for something that is not school work? (Count time spent on things such as Xbox, PlayStation, texting, watching TV/streaming, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.)." More than half (58%) of students indicated 3 or more hours of non-school related device time per day. Device use was similar for boys and girls but

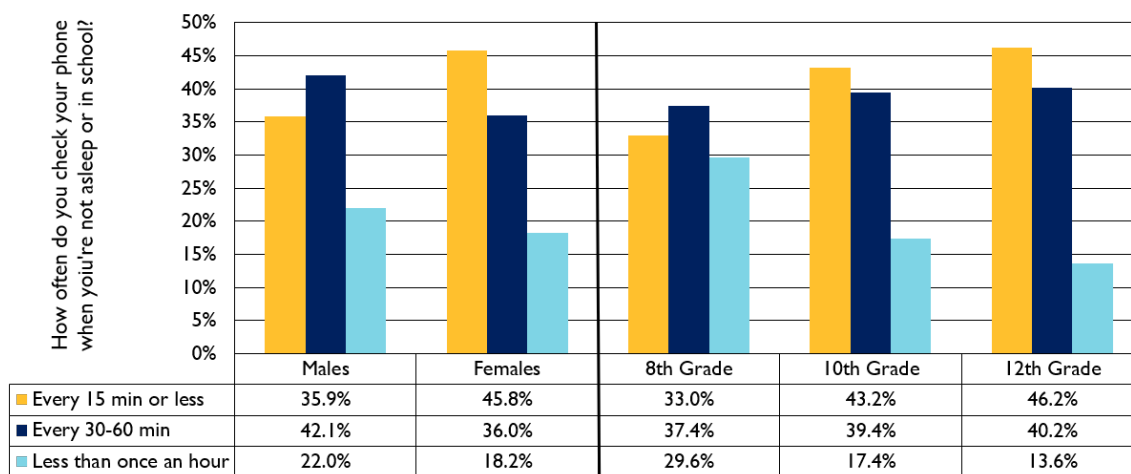
Figure 1. Number of hours of electronic device use (not for schoolwork) on an average school day (Grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 - 2025 SHARP)



increased as youth got older (47% of 6th graders indicated using 3 or more hours a day compared with 56% of 8th graders, 63% of 10th graders and 66% of 12th graders).

Additionally, youth (in grades 8, 10, and 12) were asked how often they check their phone when they are not asleep or in school.¹ Unsurprisingly, youth reported checking their phones quite frequently. About 40% indicated checking every 15 minutes or less, and another 40% indicated checking every 30-60 minutes. Overall, girls indicated checking on a more frequent basis, with 46% indicating every 15 minutes or less compared to 36% of boys who said the same (see Figure 2). In terms of age, 8th graders checked less frequently (33% reported checking every 15 minutes or less) than 10th (43%) and 12th graders (46%), which is consistent with the increased reported screen time by grade discussed earlier.

Figure 2. Frequency that youth report checking their phones by gender and grade (2025 SHARP)



Rules for screen time use

Given the extensive availability and use of mobile phones and electronic devices, it is helpful to understand the extent to which parents communicate rules for screen time to their children. Table 1 provides data about the frequency of different types of screen time rules that parents may set for their children. Youth (in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) were asked, “What rules does your family have about screen time?” 80% of youth indicated they have one or more rules for screen time use with the most common

¹6th grade students complete a shortened version of the SHARP Survey. As a result, data for some items are only available for students in grades 8, 10, and 12.

rules being: a) content that is not allowed (55%), b) apps that can't be used (47%), and c) times that screen time is not allowed (42%). Overall, boys were more likely than girls to report having rules for screen time use (specifically, for content that is not allowed and for places where screen time is not allowed). In contrast, girls were more likely to report having rules about apps that are not allowed. In terms of age, younger youth were more likely to have screen time rules. More than 85% of 6th and 8th grade students reported having one or more rules about screen time use, dropping to 78% of 10th graders and 68% of 12th graders reporting the same.

Table 1. Family rules for screen time use

	Males	Females	Total	Difference by gender
<i>Have one or more rules for screen time</i>	80.5%	80.1%	80.3%	0.4%
Have rules about content not allowed	58.3%	51.8%	55.0%	6.5%*
Have rules about apps can't use	45.3%	49.4%	47.4%	4.1%^
Have rules about times can't be used	42.5%	41.3%	41.9%	1.2%*
Have rules about total time limit	36.0%	35.9%	35.9%	0.1%
Have rules about places can't use	32.3%	27.0%	29.6%	5.3%*
None of above but have other rules	11.8%	15.1%	13.5%	3.3%^

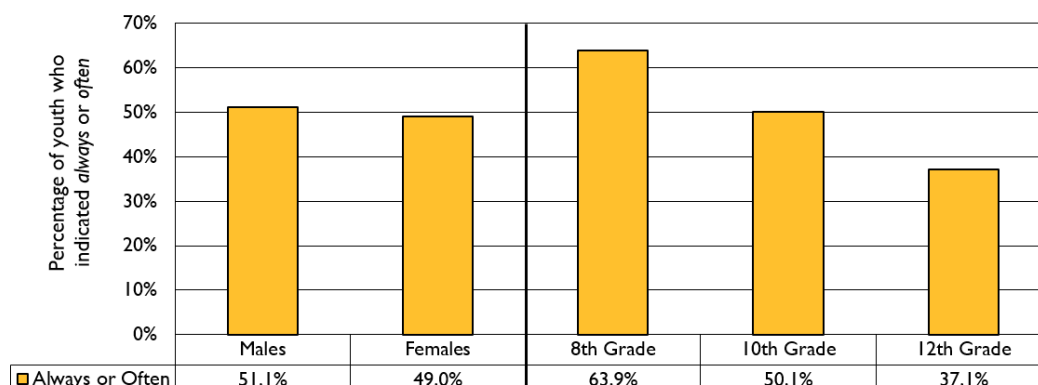
*Boys were more likely to report having rules/this rule.

^Girls were more likely to report having this rule.

While 80% of youth report having rules for screen time use, only half of youth indicated their parents enforce those rules on a consistent basis (*always* or *often* vs. *sometimes*, *rarely* or *never*). Overall, boys and girls reported similar levels of enforcement, but again, clear differences were observed for older grades (Figure 3). Enforcement is highest among 8th graders (64% indicate *always/often*) and decreases for 10th graders (50%) and 12th graders (37%) as youth become more independent and autonomous.



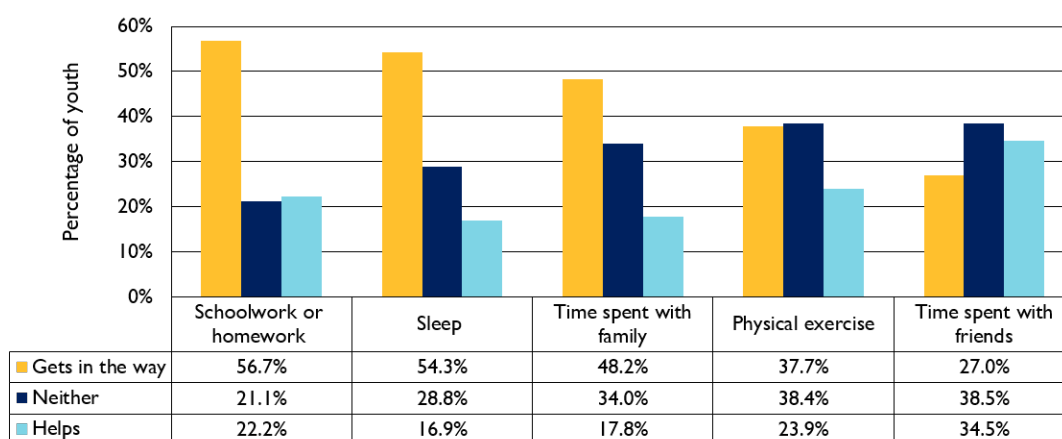
Figure 3. How often do your parents/caregivers enforce or make you follow rules about screen time? (Grades 8, 10, and 12 - 2025 SHARP)



Impacts of screen time and social media use

Screen time and social media use are associated with a variety of negative behavioral health outcomes in youth ranging from reduced sleep to increased likelihood of depression and anxiety. In recent years, the SHARP Survey (for grades 8, 10, and 12) added questions to understand the extent to which Utah youth feel screen time and social media use impact them. When asked if screen time “helps or gets in the way” of different activities and relationships, nearly half (or more) of Utah youth indicated that screen time gets in the way of schoolwork/homework, sleep, and time spent with family (Figure 4). They were less likely to report that physical exercise or time spent with friends are negatively

Figure 4. Do you think your screen time helps or gets in the way of the following? (Grades 8, 10, and 12 - 2025 SHARP)



impacted. Overall, girls were more likely to report that screen time gets in the way of all of the listed activities, but differences were modest (between 3-5% more girls indicated screen time gets in the way for each activity; Table 2). In terms of age, 10th and 12th graders were more likely than 8th graders to say that screen time gets in the way of school/homework (8th: 50%, 10th: 58% and 12th: 62%) and sleep (8th: 46%, 10th: 54% and 12th: 62%). Only small differences were observed for the other activities.

Table 2. Percentage of youth indicating that screen time gets in the way of various activities

Percentage of youth that think screen time gets in the way of*:	Males	Females	Total	Difference by gender
Schoolwork or homework	54.2%	59.2%	56.7%	5.0%
Sleep	52.4%	56.2%	54.3%	3.8%
Time spent with family	46.4%	49.9%	48.2%	3.5%
Physical exercise	35.8%	39.4%	37.6%	3.6%
Time spent with friends	25.5%	28.3%	27.0%	2.8%

*Participants who indicated screen time gets in the way *a little* or *a lot* for each activity. Alternative responses included: *neither*, *helps a little* and *helps a lot*.

Students in grades 8, 10, and 12 were also asked, “Do you think social media (YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok) makes each of the following better or worse?” The data for these items were more mixed. Overall, the most frequent response for each item was “neither better nor worse,” and there were similar percentages of youth who indicated *better* and *worse* for each of the items, with the exception of the item about body image (Figure 5). These data suggest that youth generally indicate a net neutral impact of social media use on school grades, as well as family and friend relationships, but many feel a negative impact on body image.

Similar to the data on screen time impacts, girls were more likely to report that social media has a negative impact for all of the social media items (Table 3). The most pronounced difference was for the item about body image, with over half of girls indicating social media makes them feel worse about their body. In contrast, only 32% of boys indicated the same. While differences between girls and boys for the other items were smaller, the data suggest that social media has a more negative impact on girls than boys, overall. In terms of age differences, there were only very small differences by grade for the social media items about family and friend relationships. Regarding body image, older youth were



more likely to report a negative impact of social media on body image (40% of 8th graders, 44% of 10th graders and 46% of 12th graders), and small differences were also observed between 8th graders and older students regarding social media and school grades (20% of 8th graders versus 24% of 10th and 23% of 12th graders indicated social media makes grades worse).

Figure 5. Do you think social media makes each of the following better or worse? (Grades 8, 10, and 12 - 2025 SHARP)

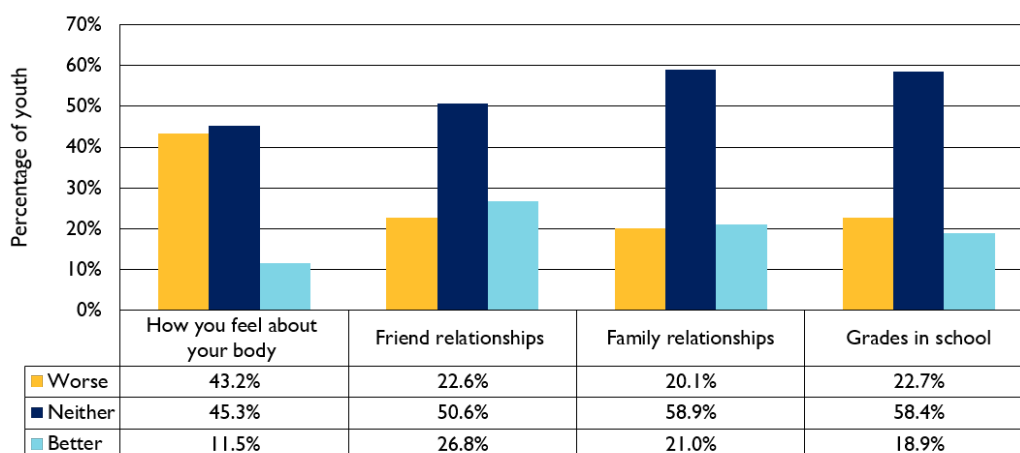


Table 3. Percentage of youth indicating that social media negatively impacts relationships, body image and school grades

Percentage of youth who think social media makes each of the following worse*:	Males	Females	Total	Difference by gender
How you feel about your body	31.8%	54.5%	43.3%	22.7%
Friend relationships	18.1%	25.1%	22.6%	7.0%
Family relationships	18.0%	23.2%	20.1%	5.2%
Grades in school	20.8%	24.7%	22.7%	3.9%

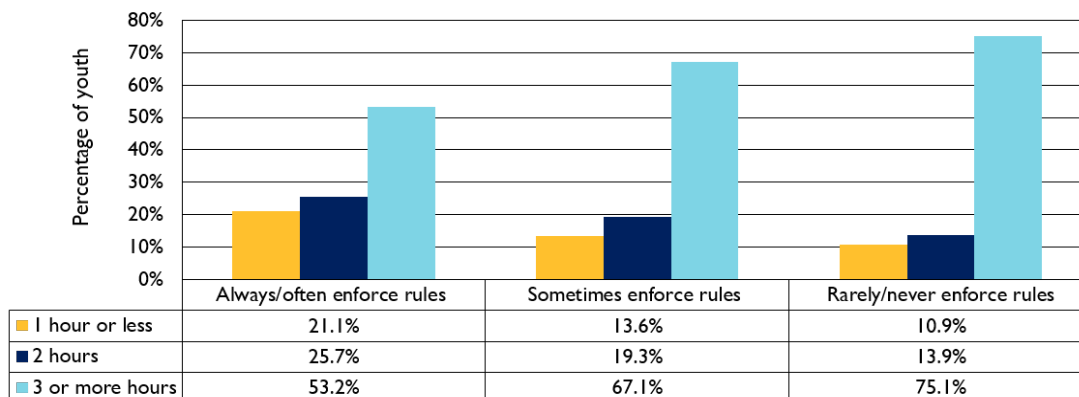
*Participants who indicated social media makes them feel *a little* or *a lot* worse for each item. Alternative responses included: *neither*, *a little better* and *a lot better*.

Rule enforcement as a buffer to use and negative impacts

There is evidence that enforcement of screen time rules may buffer some of the negative impacts of screen time. Overall, youth who reported consistent enforcement of rules reported less screen time

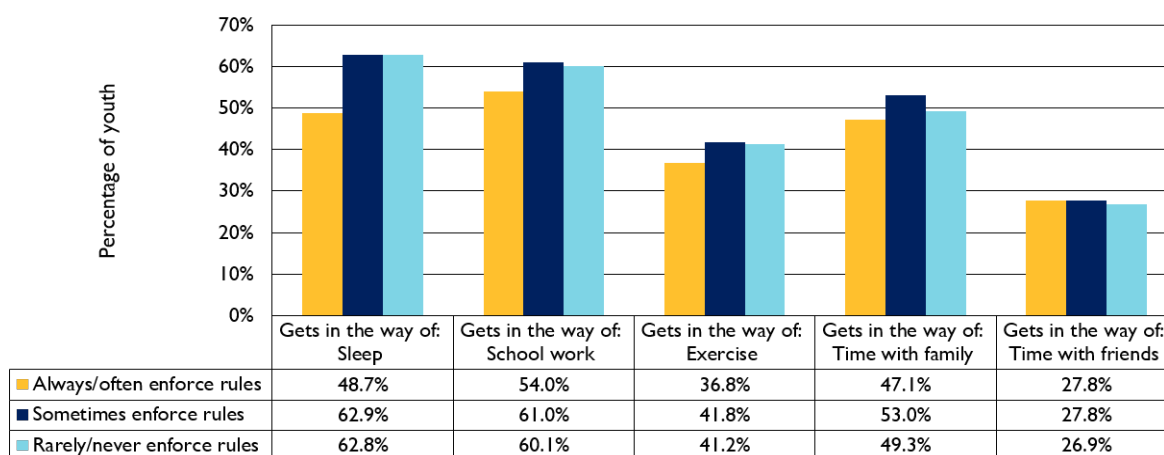
use (Figure 6). Fewer youth who indicated consistent enforcement had 3 or more hours of screen time (53%) than those who indicated inconsistent enforcement (67%) or little/no enforcement (75%).

Figure 6. Screen time use in relation to enforcement of screen time rules (Grades 8, 10, and 12 - 2025 SHARP)



Youth who reported consistent enforcement were also less likely to say that their screen time gets in the way of several activities (Figure 7). The strongest relationship was for sleep, where 63% of youth who reported inconsistent (or no) enforcement indicated screen time got in the way of sleep compared with 49% of those who reported consistent enforcement. A similar pattern was observed for school work, exercise and family time (albeit to lesser extents). There were virtually no differences in ratings for time with friends, and only small differences related to enforcement for responses to the social media impacts measured by the SHARP (body image, grades in school, and relationships).

Figure 7. Percentage of youth reporting screen time gets in the way of each activity in relation to enforcement of screen time rules (Grades 8, 10, and 12 - 2025 SHARP)



Summary

Data from the SHARP Survey provide insights about the use and impact of screen time and social media on Utah youth. High levels of screen time and phone use were reported by youth, with nearly 60% reporting 3 or more hours of non-school related screen time on an average school day. Use rates were similar for boys and girls and increased with age. Most youth (80%) indicated that their families had one or more rules for screen time use, but only 50% indicated that their parents were consistent in enforcing those rules. Similar levels of enforcement were observed for boys and girls, but enforcement was less frequent among older youth.

Regarding the impacts of screen time and social media use, nearly half (or more) of youth reported that screen time *gets in the way of*: time spent with family (48%), sleep (54%), and school/homework (56%). These impacts were more likely to be reported by 10th and 12th graders, and by girls versus boys. Regarding the negative impacts of social media, youth reported more of a net neutral impact for all of the items on the survey with the exception of impact on body image. The negative impact of social media on body image disproportionately affected girls (55% reported that social media made them feel worse about their body) versus boys (32% indicated the same). Overall, screen time and social media use appeared to have a more negative impact on girls versus boys. While the differences between girls and boys were modest for many items, there was a larger percentage of girls than boys that indicated a negative impact of screen time and social media use across all of the items on the survey. Lastly, there was evidence that rule enforcement may buffer some of the negative effects of screen time. Youth who reported their parents consistently enforced screen time rules were less likely to report that screen time gets in the way of some (albeit not all) activities such as sleep and school/homework.

