

Youth mental health and suicide prevention is a priority for the Vermont Department of Health. Rates of anxiety and depression, both risk factors for suicide, are increasing among adolescents nationwide and in Vermont. <sup>1,2,3</sup> The U.S. Surgeon General recently released an [advisory on social media and screen time for youth mental health](#).<sup>4</sup> Here in Vermont, almost a third of high school students report 5+ hours of screen time a day (not including school work).

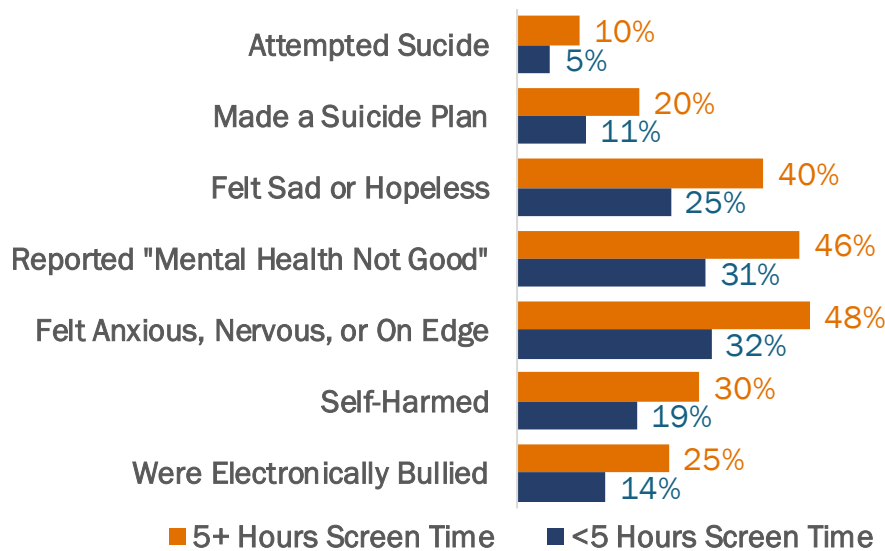
## KEY POINTS

- **Students with 5 or more hours of screen time a day are twice as likely to attempt suicide.**

The data in this report are from the 2021 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), which provides point-in-time estimates on mental health outcomes and screen time. The YRBS data cannot be used to determine causation, such as whether increased screen time directly leads to worse mental health outcomes or vice versa. However, the association between high screen time and negative mental health indicators is significant across all variables. Students with 5 or more hours of screen time are twice as likely to make a suicide plan or attempt suicide than students with less than 5 hours of screen time.

## Students with greater than 5 hours of screen time per day reported worse mental health outcomes. \*

### Percent of Students Who:



Source: YRBS, 2021

\*All data comparisons between screen time groups are statistically significant.

\*The COVID pandemic impacted 2021 YRBS data. See the [Special Considerations for the 2021 YRBS Survey](#) document for more information.

## Key Takeaways

This data can help to identify at-risk youth for mental health issues and suicidality and promote prevention activities that incorporate mental health awareness and screen time management. By understanding the relationship between screen time and mental health, communities can better support adolescents and their families in maintaining balanced and healthy lifestyles.

## Resources:

1. If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide or experiencing a mental health crisis call or text 988 or chat the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#).
2. For more information about social media and youth mental health or for resources on how to start conversations with youth about their media use, visit the [American Academy of Pediatrics Center of Excellence for Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#).
3. For more information about getting support, helping others who may be at risk for suicide, and getting more involved in suicide prevention in Vermont, go to [FacingSuicideVT.com](#).

## References:

1. [Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health, CDC, 2023](#)
2. [Worsening Mental Health for Children and Youth in Vermont, Kids Count Report, Vermont 211, 2022](#)
3. [Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide, CDC, 2024](#)
4. [Social Media and Youth Mental Health, the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023](#)

## Data Notes: YRBS Indicators Information

1. **Screen Time:** Report, on an average school day, the numbers of hours they spent in front of a TV, computer, smart phone, or other electronic device watching shows or videos, playing games, accessing the internet, or using social media (not counting time spent doing schoolwork).
2. **Suicide Attempt:** One or more suicide attempts in the past 12 months.
3. **Suicide Plan:** Made a plan about how they would attempt suicide in the past 12 months.
4. **Sad or Hopeless:** Report feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks in a row.
5. **Mental Health Not Good:** Report their mental health was not good always or most of the time during the past 30 days.
6. **Anxious, Nervous, or on Edge:** Report being bothered by feeling anxious, nervous, or on edge always or most of the time during the past 12 months.
7. **Self-Harm:** Doing something to purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die, such as cutting or burning themselves on purpose one or more times during the past 12 months.
8. **Electronic Bullying:** Report being electronically bullied (counting being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media) in the last 12 months.

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