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Teens see two sides of social media

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More than 80% of teens who use social-media sites have witnessed others being mean or cruel on the sites -- and about a quarter say they have had an interaction that resulted in a face-to-face confrontation later, a new report finds.

A substantial percentage of teens -- 41% -- reported negative experiences online, says a report out today from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, which surveyed 799 kids ages 12 to 17 and a parent or guardian. But 65% of teens say they also have had an experience on a site that made them feel good about themselves, and 58% say a site has made them feel closer to another person.

"For a lot of kids, mean, cruel behavior doesn't rise to the level of bullying," says Pew's Amanda Lenhart. Meanness and bullying often overlap, but the survey did not define the terms.

"Online lives and offline lives are now merging more and more, and that's something parents have to be aware of," says Jim Steyer, founder of Common Sense Media, a non-profit that educates kids and families about media use. "There is still so much we don't know about how (social media) affects teens' social and emotional development."

About 93% of teens surveyed say they have an account on Facebook, and 62% say the profile they use most often is set to be private so only their friends can see what they post.

Among other findings:

86% of teens say they have received advice from parents about how to be safe online.

55% of teens say they don't post content that might reflect poorly on them in the future.

22% have had an experience on social media that ended a friendship with someone.

"Sometimes parents want to help their child, but they don't know the most effective way," says Joanie Gillispie, author of *Cyber Rules: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet*.

But if a teen seeks out a parent's advice about online abuse, take it seriously, Steyer advises.

CAPTION(S):

graphic

Maureen Linke, USA TODAY

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