

# Evaluating a Social Media and Mental Health Program for Adolescents

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## Introduction

Adolescent mental health concerns have risen alongside increased social media use. Adolescents experiencing psychological stress demonstrate moderate improvement following school-based interventions (effect size  $d = 0.54$ ), with stronger effects observed among at-risk students (van Loon et al., 2020). School programs targeting problematic digital technology use have also demonstrated large reductions in problematic use immediately after intervention ( $d = 1.47$ ) and sustained improvements at follow-up ( $d = 1.13$ ) (Žmavc et al., 2024). These findings provide context for examining the effectiveness of school-based programs that address both adolescent mental health and social media use.

## Purpose

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the effectiveness of the SMART (Social Media and Resilient Teams) Club, a six-week school-based digital literacy and mental health intervention, in supporting middle school students' understanding of how social media influences mental health. In addition, this project aimed to examine students' confidence in managing online challenges such as cyberbullying, their comfort engaging in discussions about digital experiences, and their ability to apply healthier, more intentional social media practices in their everyday lives.

## Methods

Eleven anonymous feedback forms were reviewed, representing the full enrollment for the Fall 2025 semester, including two responses from returning participants in the Spring 2025 semester to provide longitudinal context. Feedback forms were transferred into Google Sheets to analyze participant perceptions and identify notable themes. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with response frequencies converted to percentages and presented in tables by each survey question (see table 1-3). Qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis, with Copilot assisting in coding key terms and detecting emerging patterns across responses.

## Findings

Findings indicated generally positive perceptions of the SMART Club, with some variability in comfort sharing individual experiences. While 54.6% of participants felt comfortable sharing thoughts, 27.3% reported low comfort. Confidence and preparedness to address cyberbullying were high (81.8%), and support for expanding the program was strongest (90.9%). Participants highlighted increased awareness of harmful online behaviors as noted by Middle School Student 1, who stated, "It made me realize how many bad and mean people are out there on the internet." Responses also emphasized that social media affects individuals

differently, reinforcing the program’s need and unique ability to focus on personalized digital well-being.

**Table 1. Comfort Sharing Thoughts in Club**

Numerical Rating (1-5)	Response Description	Frequency	Percentage (Frequency/Total Number of Participants)
5	Strongly Agree	4	36.40%
4	Agree	2	18.20%
3	Neutral	2	18.20%
2	Disagree	1	9.10%
1	Strongly Disagree	2	18.20%

**Table 2. Confidence and Preparedness to Deal with Cyberbullying**

Numerical Rating (1-5)	Response Description	Frequency	Percentage (Frequency/Total Number of Participants)
5	Strongly Agree	6	54.50%
4	Agree	3	27.30%
3	Neutral	2	18.20%
2	Disagree	0	0.00%
1	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

**Table 3. Support for Expanding Access to SMART Club**

Numerical Rating (1-5)	Response Description	Frequency	Percentage (Frequency/Total Number of Participants)
5	Strongly Agree	9	81.80%
4	Agree	1	9.10%
3	Neutral	1	9.10%
2	Disagree	0	0.00%
1	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The program effectively increased participants’ confidence and preparedness to address cyberbullying and was strongly supported for broader implementation. The program evaluation reflected greater awareness of harmful online behaviors and improved media discernment. Lower comfort with sharing individual experiences suggests an area for improvement, potentially related to the shorter six-week program duration. Extending program length and incorporating small-group activities may enhance engagement and psychological safety, underscoring the value of early digital literacy interventions in promoting healthy social media use and long-term digital well-being.

### References

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