bark

Growing up digital:
skills, safety, and resilience in an always-on world

Insights from Bark's 2025 Annual Report — and what comes next

Bark's 2025 Annual Report on Children and Technology analyzed a staggering 11.1 billion digital activities from teens and tweens, spanning texts, emails, and over 30 of the most popular apps and social media platforms among young people.

Executive summary

The impact of smartphones, social media, and addictive app design on adolescent mental health was well established long before 2025 and featured prominently in the executive summary of Bark's 2024 Annual Report. What shifted in 2025 was not awareness, but urgency.

Bark's 2025 Annual Report shows continued year-over-year increases in alerts across multiple categories, reinforcing what treatment providers see daily: **more teens and tweens are struggling to emotionally navigate digital environments** that never turn off. Anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and emotional distress are increasingly intertwined with online experiences that extend well beyond screen time alone.

Technology is not disappearing from adolescents' lives. Phones and social platforms are embedded in how young people connect, cope, and communicate. **The challenge, and opportunity, for treatment settings is not to eliminate technology entirely**, but to help adolescents reduce unhealthy use, regulate emotional responses to online experiences, and develop clarity around when technology supports their well-being and when it undermines it.

Key takeaways for behavioral health providers:

1 **Screen time is ubiquitous, and self-regulation alone is unrealistic.**

Nearly half of teens report being online almost constantly, and the vast majority use social media daily[1]. Adolescents' developing brains limit impulse control and self-regulation, making independent behavior change unlikely without structure and support[2].

2 **Digital stress is showing up as mental health distress.**

Bark's 2025 data shows increases in alerts tied to anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and emotional distress. Online interactions often intensify comparison, rejection sensitivity, and rumination, reinforcing existing vulnerabilities.

3 **Reducing screen time can improve well-being, but only with emotional support.**

Research shows that screen time reduction is associated with improvements in mood, stress, sleep, and overall well-being[3]. However, removing devices without replacement coping strategies can heighten distress.

4 **Technology often functions as a coping mechanism.**

Many adolescents turn to screens for relief from stress, loneliness, or emotional discomfort[4]. When access is limited, unmet needs surface quickly, requiring intentional support and alternative regulation strategies.

5 **Phone-free periods create opportunities for therapeutic skill-building.**

Temporary device or app restrictions, when clinically appropriate, can support work on distress tolerance, emotional awareness, social skills, and healthier coping habits.

6 **The goal is re-engagement with skills, not permanent restriction.**

Most adolescents will experience online situations that impact their mental health. It's critical that we help them build the skills to respond effectively. Limiting phone or app access in certain situations or for set periods of time can create opportunities to teach and strengthen the skills they need to navigate online spaces safely.

---

1   www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023

2   www.columbiapsychiatry.org/research/research-areas/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry/sultan-lab-mental-health-informatics/research-areas/smartphones-social-media-and-their-impact-mental-health

3   pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11846175

4   www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2025/06/screen-time-problems-children

Bark's 2025 Annual Report on children and technology

Self-harm/suicide

37% of tweens and **64% of teens** were involved in a self–harm/suicidal situation.

Anxiety

23% of tweens and **48% of teens used** language or were exposed to language about anxiety.

Sexual content

62% of tweens and **80% of teens** encountered nudity or content of a sexual nature.

Drugs/alcohol

61% of tweens and **81% of teens** engaged in conversations surrounding drugs/alcohol.

Bullying

70% of tweens and **79% of teens** experienced bullying as a bully, victim, or witness.

Depression

45% of tweens and **51% of teens** engaged in conversations about depression.

Disordered eating

15% of tweens and **34% of teens** engaged with or encountered content about disordered eating.
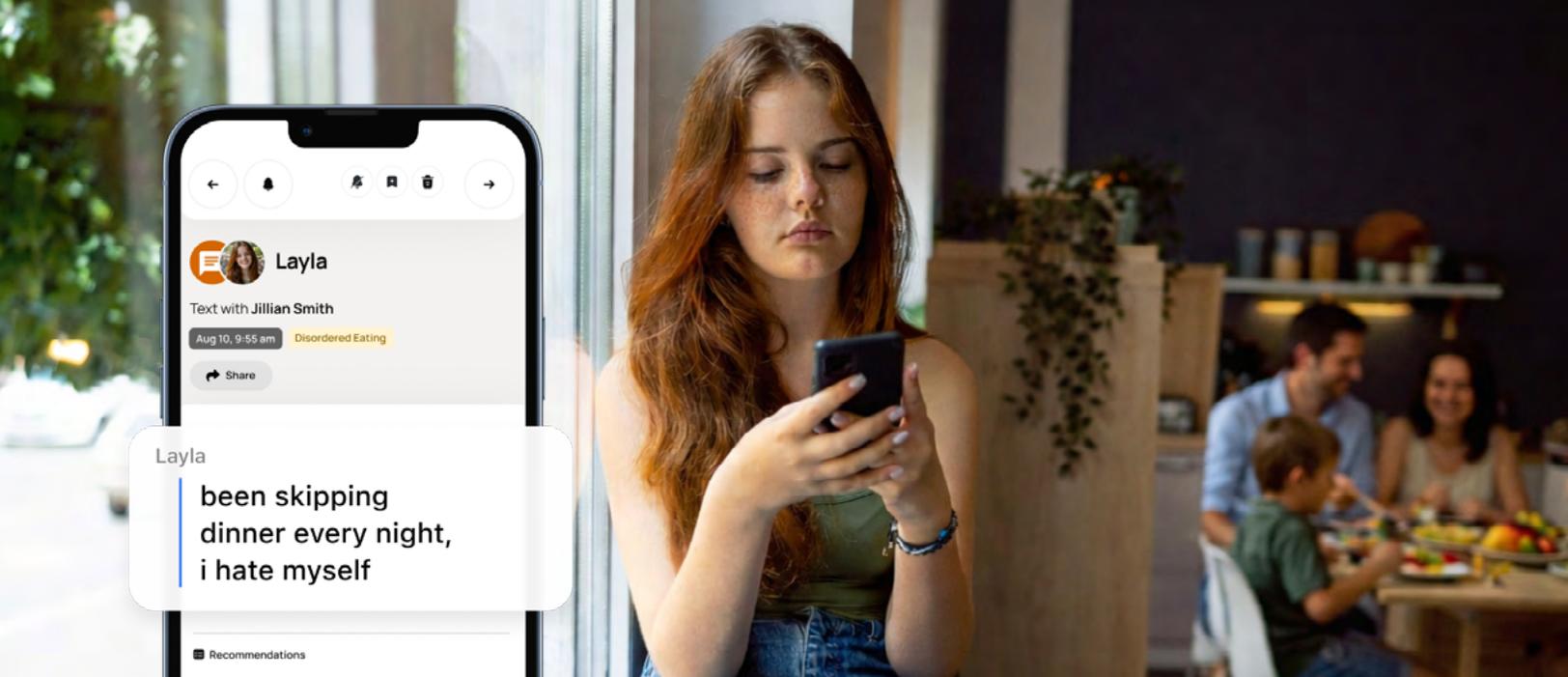
Predators

4% of tweens and **7% of teens** encountered predatory behaviors from someone online.

Violence

68% of tweens and **84% of teens** expressed or experienced violent subject matter/thoughts.

About Bark

Bark supports residential treatment centers by providing a safer way to introduce phone access during care. The Bark Phone is built specifically for safety, allowing programs to give residents controlled access to technology while maintaining appropriate clinical guardrails.

Using AI-driven monitoring and contextual analysis, Bark helps identify concerning online behavior such as self-harm, suicidal ideation, bullying, and unsafe interactions. Alerts surface risk in real time, giving treatment teams insight that can support timely intervention and informed clinical decision-making.

With tools like **phased access**, programs can gradually introduce features and apps as residents progress through treatment, using the phone as part of the therapeutic process rather than an unmanaged risk. This approach allows teams to identify areas of concern, address digital behaviors in treatment, and help residents develop healthier relationships with technology before transitioning out of care.

Why organizations trust Bark:

7+ million
children protected
each year

100+ million
activities analyzed
weekly

7.6+ million
severe bullying
situations detected

10 years
protecting youth online

Learn more by connecting with a Bark team member at **bark.us/learn/behavioral-health** or **sales@bark.us**.