

The New York Times

# The Morning

May 10, 2022



By [David Leonhardt](#)

**Good morning. We look at the mental health crisis facing adolescents — and the role of digital technology.**



The local Boys and Girls Club in Glasgow, Ky. Annie Flanagan for The New York Times

## On the phone, alone

Many measures of adolescent mental health began to deteriorate [sometime around 2009](#). It is true of the number of U.S. high-school students who say they feel persistently sad or hopeless. It's also true of reported loneliness. And it is true of emergency room visits for self-harm among Americans ages 10 to 19.

This timing is suspicious because internet use among adolescents was also starting to soar during the same period. Apple began selling the iPhone in 2007.

Facebook opened itself for general use in late 2006, and one-third of Americans were using it by 2009.

Last month, The Times began publishing a series [on adolescent mental health](#), and the latest piece — focusing on pediatricians who are struggling to help — has just published.

The author of the series is Matt Richtel, who has spent more than a year interviewing adolescents, their relatives and their friends. In my recent conversations with Matt about his reporting, he has gone out of his way to emphasize the uncertainty about the specific causes of the crisis, including how much of a role social media plays.

“When you look at specific research on the role of social media impacting young people, it’s quite conflicted,” he said. Some studies find that adolescents who use social media heavily are more likely to feel sad or depressed, while others find little or no effect. There is no proof that, say, TikTok or social media’s “like” button is causing the mental-health crisis.

But Matt also thinks that some of these narrow questions of cause and effect are secondary. What seems undeniable, he points out, is that surging use of digital technology has changed life’s daily rhythms.

It has led adolescents to spend less time on in-person activities, like dating, hanging out with friends and attending church. Technology use has also contributed to declines in exercise and sleep. The share of high-school students who slept at least eight hours a night fell 30 percent from 2007 to 2019, Derek Thompson of The Atlantic [has noted](#).

Technology use is not the sole cause of these trends. Modern parenting strategies, among other factors, play a role as well. But digital technology — be it social media, video games, text messaging or other online activity — plays a strong role, many experts say.

“If you’re not getting some outdoor relief time and enough sleep — and you can almost stop at not enough sleep — any human being is challenged,” Matt said. “When you get the pubescent brain involved in that equation, you are talking about somebody being really, really challenged to feel contented and peaceful and happy with the world around them.”

The role of any specific social-media platform or behavior may remain unknown, but the larger story about American adolescents and their emotional

struggles is less mysterious.

“They have too much screen time, they’re not sleeping, on phones all the time,” Dr. Melissa Dennison, a pediatrician in central Kentucky who sees many unhappy adolescents, told Matt. Dennison regularly encourages her patients to take walks outdoors or attend church.

It’s true that the decline of in-person interactions has had a few silver linings. Today’s adolescents are less likely to use tobacco, drink alcohol or get pregnant. But the net effect of less socializing is negative. Most human beings struggle when they are not spending time in the company of others.

The Covid-19 pandemic, of course, [has exacerbated isolation, loneliness and depression](#). In December, the U.S. surgeon general warned of a “devastating” mental health crisis among America’s youth.



A 12-year-old patient of Dr. Dennison in Kentucky. Annie Flanagan for The New York Times

I find Covid to be a particularly relevant comparison. Over the past two-plus years, millions of American parents have demonstrated intense concern for their children by trying to protect them from Covid. Fortunately, Covid happens to be [mild for the vast majority of children](#), causing neither severe illness nor long-term symptoms. One sign of that: Young children, not yet eligible for vaccination, are at considerably less risk on average than vaccinated people over 65.

Still, I understand why so many parents remain anxious. Covid is new and

scary. It taps into parents' fierce protective instincts.

What makes less sense to me is why our society has done so little to protect children from the apparent damages of ubiquitous digital media. They are almost certainly larger for most children than the threat from Covid.

### For more:

- Matt's latest story describes [the difficulties facing pediatricians](#), who now routinely deal with complex psychiatric issues and often prescribe powerful psychiatric medications for lack of better alternatives. ([The full series is here.](#))
- "The most important change we can make to reduce the damaging effects of social media on children is to delay entry until they have passed through puberty," Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist, [writes in The Atlantic](#).
- In The Washington Post, Ellen McCarthy profiles parents [who refuse to give their children smartphones](#).

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## THE LATEST NEWS

### War in Ukraine





The Victory Day military parade in Moscow. Alexander Zemlianichenko/Associated Press

- Vladimir Putin’s Victory Day speech was [notable for what it left out](#): It contained no claims of victory and no calls for a wider conflict.
- In [his own speech](#), Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s president, said that Russia was “repeating the horrific crimes of Hitler’s regime today.”
- The Ukrainian military’s counteroffensive in the east has forced Russian forces to redeploy. And in the south, Russia [launched missile strikes into Odesa](#), the Black Sea port city.
- President Biden [agreed to send weapons to Ukraine more quickly](#), deepening U.S. involvement in the war.
- “He doesn’t understand what he has to do with it”: In Europe’s schoolyards, [Russian-speaking students](#) face bullying.

## International



Supporters of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Manila yesterday. Jes Aznar for The New York Times

- Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is expected to [win the Philippines presidential election](#). The country ousted Marcos’s father, a dictator, in the 1980s.
- Sri Lanka’s prime minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa, [resigned after months of protests](#) over an economic crisis.

## Other Big Stories

- States are cutting taxes to help people cope with rising prices. But those cuts are also [making inflation worse](#).
- A hunt for a [corrections officer and the inmate she helped escape](#) ended in a crash. The inmate surrendered, and the officer fatally shot herself.
- Across the U.S., [white evangelical churches are at odds](#) over many of the same issues dividing the Republican Party and other institutions.
- Andy Warhol's silk-screen of Marilyn Monroe [sold for \\$195 million at auction](#), a record for an American artist.
- To cut emissions, large energy companies are selling off polluting assets worth billions. But [they often sell to buyers with looser climate goals](#).
- New York Times journalists [won four Pulitzer Prizes](#), while “The Netanyahu” won for fiction and “Fat Ham” for drama. [See the list](#).

## Opinions

Words like “phases” and “offensives” can make the war in Ukraine sound tidy, but it's not clear [where war stops and normal life begins](#), **Tanya Kozyreva** writes.

Overturning Roe v. Wade is morally right, but doing so may turn out to be [economically and socially damaging](#), **Matthew Walther** argues.

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## MORNING READS

**Reinventing pitching:** Does anyone [know more about throwing things](#) than Tom House?

**Diagnose:** Why [heart disease in women](#) is often missed or dismissed.

**A Times classic:** Stories [that bind families together](#).

**Advice from Wirecutter:** [Two-factor authentication](#) keeps your accounts safer.

**Lives Lived:** Midge Decter, an architect of neoconservatism, abandoned

liberal politics, challenged the women’s movement and championed the Reagan Republican agenda. [She died at 94.](#)

## ARTS AND IDEAS



“A Strange Loop” is about a Black queer man’s self-perception in relation to his art. Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

## The Tony Awards

Yesterday, the Tony Awards [announced nominees](#). The ceremony will be hosted by Ariana DeBose, who won an Academy Award for “West Side Story” this year.

**Most-nominated:** [“A Strange Loop,”](#) a Pulitzer-winning musical about an aspiring theater writer, written by Michael R. Jackson. The show earned 11 nominations, including best musical. Good luck finding tickets.

**Awards for everyone!** Of the 34 shows eligible for nominations, 29 received at least one nod, including the [critically scorned “Diana.”](#)

**OK, not everyone:** It’s not a real awards show unless somebody is snubbed. [“Pass Over,”](#) a well-reviewed play by Antoinette Chinonye Nwandu, was shut out. So were the married couple Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick, who are in a popular revival of “Plaza Suite.” Daniel Craig didn’t score a nomination for his role in “Macbeth,” though his co-star, Ruth Negga, did.

**How can I watch?** The show, scheduled for June 12 at Radio City Music Hall, will feature two parts: an hourlong awards segment streamed on Paramount+, followed by a three-hour, performance-heavy show broadcast on CBS.

Here's the [list of nominees](#).

## PLAY, WATCH, EAT

### What to Cook



Armando Rafael for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Simon Andrews.

The [Tajín sauce on this grilled chicken](#) is just as electric on fish or shrimp skewers.

### What to Watch

“Chan is Missing,” [a seminal 1982 neo-noir comedy](#) set in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

### What to Read

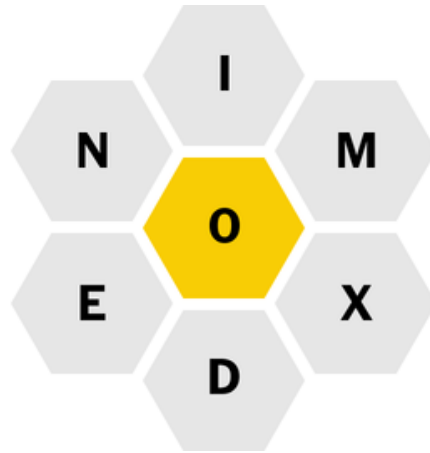
The [essay collection “Tacky,” by Rax King](#), finds joy in the bad-taste era of Creed and frosted lip gloss. The critic Dwight Garner calls the book “ebullient.”



## Late Night

The hosts discussed [what Mark Esper said about Donald Trump](#).

## Now Time to Play



The pangram from yesterday’s Spelling Bee was *backyard*. Here is today’s puzzle — or you can [play online](#).

Here’s [today’s Wordle](#). Here’s [today’s Mini Crossword](#) and a clue: Dummy (five letters).

If you’re in the mood to play more, find [all our games here](#).

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***Thanks for spending part of your morning with The Times. See you tomorrow. — David***

P.S. The Times’s Andrea Elliott won a Pulitzer [for her book about Dasani](#), a girl who grew up homeless in New York. ([This newsletter](#) has written about Andrea’s reporting.)

*Correction: Yesterday’s newsletter incorrectly stated it was Victory Day in Europe. It was Victory Day only in Russia. (Victory Day in Europe was May 8.)*

Here’s [today’s front page](#).

“[The Daily](#)” is about Victory Day. On “[Popcast](#),” a decade of drill music.

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