## **Background**

## In the U.S., increased levels of adolescent loneliness have run parallel to increased social media use

- Adolescents' levels of loneliness doubled from 2012 to 2018, while in-person interactions with peers diminished by 42%
- Loneliness further increased after the COVID-19 pandemic
- Now, about half of adolescents report feeling lonely





- In 2022, adolescents reported being constantly online twice as often compared to 2014-15
- 95 % of U.S. teens use YouTube, 67% TikTok, 62% Instagram, and 59% Snapchat





## **Background**

#### Loneliness is a stress factor for our brain/body

Adolescent loneliness is a risk factor for:

- Mental health problems
- Psychiatric symptoms
- Poor health
- Previous studies showed that, in adolescents, <u>poor social</u>
  <u>relationships showed comparable effects to physical inactivity</u>
  <u>on inflammation risk</u>, a by-product of high cortisol levels.
- Poor relationship patterns initiate <u>stress response cascades</u> <u>that persist later in life</u>
- Protective effects of good social connections against stress are larger in adolescence: "adolescent social connections differentiate health risks in young adults, long before symptoms or overt signs of disease emerge"





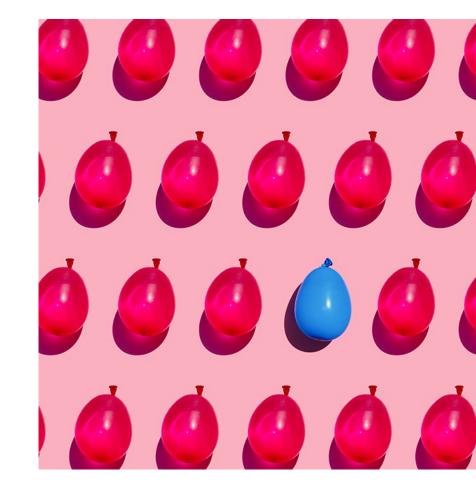


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## **Background**

# Why studying loneliness and social media use in adolescence?

- During adolescence, the most relevant social context for wellbeing shifts from family to peer relationships
- The <u>adolescent brain reacts differently to social interactions</u> with peers than children and adults, and it is highly susceptible to the experience of stress.
- Adolescent loneliness (as a source of stress) and mental wellbeing (a fundamental element of resilience) <u>critically depend</u> on the quality of social connections with strong ties, like peers and friends
- How peer relationships have been transformed by the social media context is a vitally important matter that needs further understanding







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