

# News Summaries

## Mental Health Harms and Loss of Life Experienced by Young People Due to Social Media Platform Design Practices

1. In 2017, Molly Russell, 14, died by suicide after a months-long struggle with distressing online content. Unbeknownst to her family, Molly engaged with thousands of pieces of self-harm and suicide-related material on Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/sep/30/how-molly-russell-fell-into-a-vortex-of-despair-on-social-media>
2. Alexis Spence, who began using Instagram at 11, suffered anorexia, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts due to the platform's "addictive" nature. Spence's engagement with harmful content led to her hospitalization at 19. In 2022, a lawsuit against Meta was filed on her behalf, as the company was aware of harm to teenage girls caused by their algorithms. <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/meta-lawsuit-instagram-caused-eating-disorder-self-harm-rcna32221>
3. The mother of 11-year-old Selena Rodriguez, who died by suicide, is suing Meta and Snapchat. For over two years, Selena struggled with severe addiction to Instagram and Snapchat, battling mental health concerns and pressure to share sexually explicit content. Her time on these platforms resulted in her hospitalization for low self-esteem, eating disorders, and self-harm before her tragic death. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/01/22/selena-rodriguez-suicide-meta-snap-lawsuit/>
4. In 2021, Snapchat discontinued its "speed filter," which allowed users to record and share their speed while driving, following widespread criticism and its link to numerous car accidents and fatalities. Among the tragic incidents is the 2017 story of three youth from Wisconsin, aged 17, 17, and 20, who reached a speed of 123 mph on the feature before fatally colliding with a tree. <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/17/1007385955/snapchat-ends-speed-filter-that-critics-say-encouraged-reckless-driving>
5. Laura Thornton's 13-year-old daughter returned from a summer away, deeply affected by anorexia, leading to her immediate hospitalization. Engaging in online "meal plan contests" where girls boast about minimal eating, she fell prey to extreme diet culture perpetuated on social media. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/10/04/eating-disorders-social-media-anorexia-democracy-disinformation/>

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6. In 2020, Carson Bride, a 16-year-old from Lake Oswego, Oregon, tragically died by suicide after receiving hundreds of harassing messages on the Yolo app, integrated into Snapchat, which allowed anonymous communication. His mother, Kristin Bride, discovered Carson's distressing online interactions and his desperate attempts to stop the harassment through his search history in the days leading up to his death. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/jan/16/online-harms-social-media-lawsuits>

7. Samuel Chapman of Los Angeles is urging California lawmakers to protect kids online after his 16-year-old son, Sammy, died from a fentanyl overdose from drugs purchased through Snapchat. Sammy fell victim to a drug dealer who used the platform's disappearing messages feature to present him with illicit "drug menus." Chapman emphasizes that Snapchat's features, such as location sharing and friend recommendations, enabled drug dealers to specifically target his son. <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2023-08-09/meta-instagram-twitter-tiktok-social-media-onlinesafety>

8. Alexandra Martin, a 19-year-old from Kentucky was introduced to Instagram at just 12 years old. Alexandra was exposed to harmful content that contributed to the development of anxiety, depression, and ultimately anorexia, resulting in hospitalization and suicide attempts. Despite being underage, the lawsuit claims Instagram actively encouraged her to open multiple accounts, compounding the harmful effects of its algorithms. <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/News/instagram-eating-disorders-depression-young-girls-lawsuits-claim/story?id=87418473>

9. Lalani Erika Renee Walton, 8, of Temple, Texas, and Arriani Jaileen Arroyo, 9, of Milwaukee died while participating in the dangerous "blackout challenge" on TikTok, which encouraged users to choke themselves until they lost consciousness. The parents are suing TikTok, alleging that the platform enticed young users, failed to warn them of the risks, and did not do enough to prevent the dissemination of dangerous challenges. <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/parents-sue-tiktok-deaths-two-girls-blackout-challenge-rcna37100> & <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/06/technology/tiktok-blackout-challenge-deaths.html>

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10. Erik Robinson, aged 12, and Garrett Pope, aged 11, tragically passed away from accidental asphyxiation while attempting to get high playing the "Choking Game." The challenge, which is connected to the death of dozens of young people, was widespread and easily accessible to youth through video tutorials on platforms like YouTube. <https://time.com/5189584/choking-game-pass-out-challenge/>

11. In 2015, Christopher James (CJ) Dawley, died by suicide at the age of 17 after struggling with social media addiction. CJ's parents allege that his excessive time on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat led to sleep deprivation, obsession with body image, and ultimately, his untimely death. They have filed a lawsuit against Snap and Meta. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/19/tech/social-media-lawsuits-teen-suicide/index.html>

12. In 2020, Annalee Schott tragically took her own life at the age of 18. Digging through Annalee's journals and TikTok account, her mother Lori discovered numerous videos where young individuals glamorized self-harm and self-hate, many of which garnered significant likes. Motivated by Annalee's passing, Lori became a strong advocate for the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA). <https://www.denver7.com/news/360/our-children-deserve-better-colorado-mom-pushes-for-online-regulation-after-losing-daughter-to-suicide>