


PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN



IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

AN INFORMATIVE GUIDE TO KEEPING KIDS SAFE

Parents can help kids struggling with social media

Social media is a big part of young people's lives. Psychology Today reports that social media use is now the most common activity children and teenagers engage in, with the majority of users accessing social media platforms several times each day through their personal cell phones.

Social media has its benefits, and being able to keep in touch with friends and family remotely was one of the saving graces in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when people were isolating in their homes. But there's a dark side to social media as well. Recently leaked documents from Meta, the company that oversees social media giants Facebook and Instagram, suggest the company has known for several years that its Instagram app is contributing to body image issues and other mental health problems

for teens, particularly females. Social media platforms use algorithms to enhance users' engagement. Feeds may be driven toward polarizing topics or those that have the most shock value, further leading teens down a negative path.

The current tween and teen generation is faced with constant information being delivered right to their handheld devices. Children may not be developmentally ready for the immediate gratification that social media provides nor the constant onslaught of content. As a result, teens increasingly are becoming more irritable, having trouble sleeping and are spending more time alone as a result of phone usage. The Harvard Graduate School of Education says recent studies have noted a significant uptick in depression and suicidal thoughts over the past several years

for teens, especially those who spend multiple hours a day using screens.

There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media.

- Set real limits. The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health suggests that until meaningful government oversight is in place to police social media platforms, parents will have to set their own parameters for use. Putting phones down at meal times, turning off alerts close to bedtime, and making certain days "a rest from technology" can help.
- Block upsetting content. It's a parent's job to be a parent, not a best friend. Giving in to requests to engage with certain social platforms, even when they do not align with one's beliefs or values, can be harmful. Set



MONITOR SOCIAL MEDIA. There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media.

limits on which platforms children are allowed to use.

- Regularly monitor kids' usage. Parents should look through their kids' phones and accounts on a regular basis to see

which sites are being visited and how kids are engaging with others. If social media is affecting a child's mental health, have him or her take a break or delete the account.

Social media is ever-

present in kids' lives. Parents and other caregivers have to find a way to assist struggling tweens and teens with social media so it does not become a detriment to their overall health.

How to talk with your kids about vaping

Courtesy of Partnership for Drug-Free Kids
www.drugfree.org

What is Vaping?

Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol, often referred to as vapor, produced by an e-cigarette or similar device.

It's become more popular among teens than regular cigarettes, especially given that vaping devices can be used for anything from flavors like mango, mint or tutti frutti, to flavorings containing nicotine or THC, the chemical compound in marijuana that produces the high.

What are the Risks?

There are several risks to vaping for teens. Below are three major ones for parents to be concerned about:

Vaping is often marketed to kids, downplaying the dangers.

With lots of flavors available for vaping liquids, as well as the vari-

ety of colors and devices available that charge just like cell phones, it's clear that vaping products are often marketed to teens.

One of the slang terms for vaping, known as JUULing ("jeweling"), comes from the JUUL brand device that looks more like a flash drive as opposed to an e-cigarette. Vaping is also often sold as a "safer" alternative to cigarettes, and some teens are under the false assumption that because e-cigarettes don't contain tobacco they're safe.

Vaping chemicals used in the liquids can be more concentrated and dangerous.

Inhaling from a vape pen or e-cigarette, especially in the case of one containing nicotine or THC, can enhance a drug user's high and can amplify a drug's side effects.

Vaping is also very new and there are literally hundreds of brands, so there's not a lot of firm information about what chemicals might be in



what vape liquids.

But even beyond nicotine and THC, synthetic chemicals that make up these liquids – including "herbal incense" like spice and synthetic marijuana – expose the lungs to a variety of chemicals, which could include carcinogens and toxic metal nanoparticles from the device itself.

Not only could these chemicals make their way into young lungs, causing irritation and potentially "smoker's cough," but they could also damage the inside of the mouth and create sores.

The CDC recommends against avoiding vaping because of the proliferation of lung illnesses.

Vaping may make the transition to cigarette smoking easier in adolescence.

In a meta analysis of six studies, the findings concluded that the risk of smoking increases four times if a teen vapes versus a teen that does not.

In another study of more than 2,000 10th graders, researchers found that one in five teens who reported a regular vaping habit at the start of the study smoked traditional cigarettes at least three times a month by the end of the study period.

Another 12 percent of routine vapers smoked at least one day a month. By comparison, less than 1 percent of students who didn't try vaping reported smoking even one day a month at the end of the study.

What Can Parents Do?

Make it clear to your son or daughter that you don't approve of them vaping or using e-cigarettes, no matter what.

If you think your son

or daughter is vaping, take a deep breath and set yourself up for success by creating a safe, open and comfortable space to start talking with your son or daughter.

As angry or frustrated as you feel, keep reminding yourself to speak and listen from a place of love, support and concern.

Explain to them that young people who use THC or nicotine products in any form, including e-cigarettes or vaporizers, are uniquely at risk for long-lasting effects.

Because these substances affect the development of the brain's reward system, continued use can lead to addiction (the likelihood of addiction increases considerably for those who start young), as well as other health problems.

You want your child to be as healthy as possible.

Find out why vaping might be attractive to your son or daughter, and work with him or her to replace it with a healthier behavior.

Education Should Start Sooner Than You Think




INTERNET SAFETY TIPS

- NEVER give out personal information such as your name, home address, school name or telephone number in a chat room or on bulletin boards. Also, never send a picture of yourself to someone you chat with on the computer without your parent's permission.
- NEVER write to someone who has made you feel uncomfortable or scared.
- DO NOT meet someone or have them visit you without the permission of your parents.
- TELL your parents right away if you read anything on the internet that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- REMEMBER that people online may not be who they say they are. Someone who says that "she" is a "12-year-old girl" could really be an older man.
- PARENTS: Make sure to monitor your child's social media activity.

PLAYGROUND SAFETY TIPS

- Check playgrounds where your children play. Look for age-appropriate equipment and hazards, such as rusted or broken equipment and dangerous surfaces. Report any hazards to the school or appropriate local office.
- Avoid playgrounds with non-impact absorbing surfaces, such as asphalt, concrete, grass, dirt or gravel.
- Dress appropriately for the playground. Remove necklaces, purses, scarves or clothing with drawstrings that can get caught on equipment and pose a strangulation hazard. Even helmets can be dangerous on a playground, so save those for bikes.
- Teach children that pushing, shoving or crowding while on the playground can be dangerous.
- Ensure that children use age-appropriate playground equipment.

Courtesy: safekids.org





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Signs children might be victims of bullying

Despite the best efforts of educators and parents, bullying is a problem at many schools. According to *StopBullying.gov*, an official website of the United States government, as many as one in three American students say they have been bullied at school.

And the problem is not exclusive to the United States, as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research report that at least one in three adolescent students in Canada report being recent victims of bullying.

Bullied students often suffer in silence. As a result, the onus is on parents to learn the signs that a child is a victim of bullying. Such signs are not always easy to recognize, as *StopBullying.gov* notes that the most common types of bullying are verbal and social. Physical bullying happens less often, so kids who are being bullied may not exhibit physical symptoms like bruises or unexplained injuries, which are common indicators of physical bullying. By learning the common signs of bullying, parents are in better position to recognize when their children are being bullied, whether that bullying is physical, social or verbal.

Signs of bullying

There are many signs of bullying and kids may not exhibit them all. In fact, *StopBullying.gov* notes that some bullied children exhibit no warning signs. So in addition to learning these signs of bullying, parents can make a concerted effort to communicate with their children every day, asking youngsters about how their day went and if they encountered anything that adversely affected their mood.

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends

or avoidance of social situations

- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors, such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

Parents are urged to report any concerns about bullying to educators immediately, as research indicates bullying can lead to or worsen feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, and despair. Bullying also can lead to or worsen feelings of depression and anxiety, which can contribute to suicidal behavior.

Learn more about bullying and how to combat it at www.StopBullying.gov.



STOP BULLYING. Victims of bullying may experience short- and long-term consequences. Learn the warning signs and communicate with your children.

How to spot signs of cyberbullying

Despite its relative infancy, the internet has become so prevalent in daily life that it's hard to imagine a time when it wasn't so widely available. Yet that time wasn't so long ago. In fact, many adults who are now entering or in middle-age made it through their secondary educations without the internet. That's not so for today's students, and that divide can sometimes make it difficult for parents to spot signs that their children are victims of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying refers to the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending intimidating and/or threatening messages. These messages may be sent in various ways, including through apps or via social media platforms. According to *StopBullying.gov*, a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, research has shown that a quick and consistent response to bullying is an effective way to convey that such behavior is unacceptable. But parents first must learn to recognize signs of cyberbullying, which is not always as easy to spot as other bullying behaviors.

The Anti-Defamation League notes that hateful words and rumors are often a component of cyberbullying. In such instances, that abuse can follow young people home, giving them the idea that the bullying is inescapable. In decades past, bullying victims could at least see their homes as safe havens. That's no longer the case, which is why it's vital that parents learn to recognize the signs of cyberbullying.

Young people may exhibit their own unique symptoms if they're being victimized by cyberbullying. In addition, the ADL notes that parents can look for these signs and then take immediate action if they suspect their children are being cyberbullied.

- A child becomes upset, sad or angry during or after being online or using their phone.
- A child withdraws from family or friends.
- A child expresses reluctance or refuses to participate in activities previously enjoyed.
- A child has an unexplained decline in grades.
- A child refuses to go to school or expresses anger or dissatisfaction with a specific class or school in general.

• A child increasingly reports symptoms of illness for which he or she wants to stay at home.

• A child shows signs of depression or sadness.

The ADL urges parents who see any of these signs to respond to them immediately. Take a gentle, supportive tone during any discussions with children, making sure to express your concerns while also listening to the child when he or she explains what is so upsetting.

Parents who have confirmed or suspect their child is a victim of cyberbullying should contact their children's school immediately. More information about how to respond to cyberbullying and prevent its recurrence is available at www.StopBullying.gov.



CYBERBULLYING IS AN ISSUE TOO! Parents can look for several signs and then take immediate action if they suspect their children are being cyberbullied.

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Childproofing checklist to keep kids safe

It's not long before newborns who need their parents to cater to their every need become toddlers who can't wait to go exploring on their own. The curiosity can come quickly, which underscores how important it is for parents to childproof their homes.

Childproofing is essential in the nursery where children tend to spend much of their time, but it's necessary elsewhere in the house as well. The Children's Hospital of Los Angeles says fractures are the most common injuries among infants and toddlers as they develop a sense of curiosity and gain mobility. Head and mouth/tooth injuries are some additional injuries curious kids may suffer during this period in their lives. This childproofing checklist can help reduce the risk of injury.

- Follow United States Consumer Product Safety Commission crib safety regulations, which include fixed sides, a firm mattress and slats that are no more than 23/8 inches apart.
- Install UL-listed carbon monoxide detectors and smoke detectors on every story of the house and check batteries in detectors frequently.
- Install a temperature guard on the water heater and never set it above 120 F.
- Cover all sharp furniture edges and corners with safety padding or specialty bumpers.
- Block all open outlets with outlet covers or safety plugs.
- Place lockable covers on the garbage.
- Install stove knob covers.
- Use latches on any drawers, toilets, doors, or cabinets within the child's reach.
- Anchor heavy furniture, such as televisions, bookshelves and dressers, to the walls.
- Install safety guards on windows.
- Pull the crib away from other furniture.
- Use cordless window blinds.
- Place gates at the top and bottom of stairs and use them to prevent access to rooms that are off limits.
- Store cleaning supplies, tools and breakable items out of reach or in a locked cabinet.
- When the child reaches 35 inches in height or can climb out of the crib, it's time to transition to a toddler bed.
- Choose toy chests or other furniture with spring-loaded hinges.
- Do not hang heavy wall art or shelving over cribs.
- Cover radiators, hot pipes, etc., with protective materials.

Remove flaking paint and be sure to have paint tested for lead.

Inspect the home for protruding nails, bolts or other hardware that can cause injury.

These are some childproofing measures parents can implement to keep kids safe. Parents can customize childproofing plans based on their needs and the designs of their homes. Consult with a pediatrician for other tips on making a home safe for young children.



There are many things you can do in your home to keep your child safe.

Poison prevention tips

Potential stressors for kids

The Health Resources and Services Administration says that more than 90 percent of poisonings happen at home — with many occurring in the bathroom, kitchen and bedroom. The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that the 55 poison control centers across the United States receive millions of calls every year. Many interactions with poisons can be avoided by implementing smart poison control strategies at home.

Choose products with child safety caps

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports nine out of 10 poisoning incidents involving children occur in the home. In 2019, approximately 67,500 children under the age of five ended up in emergency rooms due to unintended poisoning. Parents can protect children by keeping medicines in their original child-safe containers. When buying cleansers, cleaners and detergents, choose products that have strong child-safety lids and seals.

Up and away

Store cleaning products and cosmetics up high or behind locked cabinet doors. Simply having them out of sight and out of mind can prevent interaction.

Use original containers

It's tempting to transfer certain cleaning products or chemicals to other bottles or jars for ease of use, but this can be dangerous. People in the home may mistakenly ingest something if it is transferred to a beverage container or something typically used for food storage. Plus, should ingestion occur, you will no longer have the safety label in place. That means you won't have immediate access to safety protocols that can save lives.

Avoid sharing meds

Never share prescription medicines with other people. Poisoning can occur because medicines are prescribed based on weight and other physical factors. One individual can be seriously impaired by a medication even if it's safe for another person. In addition, drugs can interact with other medicines, including over-the-counter products, further increasing the risk for accidents.

Monitor children

Supervise children when using any products, as they can be dangerous if not used correctly. These include art supplies, cleaning supplies and even hand sanitizers and soaps.

Handle foods properly

Foods must be properly stored at the correct temperature and cooked to a safe level. Always wash fresh fruits and vegetables with running water. Never use commercial cleaning products on foods or food packaging. Always wash hands and counters before preparing food. Promptly refrigerate or freeze foods if they will be saved as leftovers, as bacteria can grow quickly at room temperature.

Keep the poison hotline number nearby

Program the National Poison Help Line number into your cell phone and post it near the landline phone. It is 1-800-222-1222. Promptly call in a poisoning situation for assistance.

Poison prevention is an important lesson to review at home and discuss with all household members to avoid potentially fatal injuries.

Work is often cited as the primary cause of stress. Indeed, work-related stress is a global issue. According to the Global Organization for Stress, workers in countries as different as the United States, Australia and China all report confronting considerable work-related stress. But framing stress as an issue primarily affecting workers overlooks how it affects kids.

The Global Organization for Stress reports that stress is the number one health concern for high school students. Kids dealing with stress experience many of the same symptoms as adults, which the Mayo Clinic reports include headaches, chest pain, anxiety, and mood swings, among others. But stress triggers differ for kids and adults, and parents concerned about stress affecting their children can learn about potential stressors so they can be better prepared to help children get through stressful experiences.

The Boys and Girls Club of America notes that stressors change as children grow up. Parents can keep that in mind but also recognize that certain events can contribute to stress regardless of how old a child is.

General stressors

The BGCA notes that kids of all ages may be stressed by incidents or experiences that can affect kids whether they're in elementary school or approaching high school graduation. Such stressors include:

- Conflicts with friends
- Bullying
- Peer pressure
- Academic struggles, including poor performance and difficulties with the curriculum
- Problems socializing
- Disappointing parents
- Parents' divorce or separation
- Family financial struggles
- Unsafe or precarious living situation

Stressors for children

New experiences are among the stressors that affect children. Such experiences can include being away from home and performing in front of others, whether it's in a sport, school play or other public forum. Children also may feel stress if or when they are picked last for a sports team. Perceived dangers, even when there's no imminent threat, also can be stressors for young children. Such dangers may include kidnapping, fires and natural disasters, among others.

Stress for preteens and teens

The bodily changes associated with puberty are among the potential stressors for kids in this age group. The changes children undergo at this stage in life also can lead to issues with self-esteem and other negative thoughts, and that can be a stressor for some kids. The specter of college and the uncertainty that life after high school can spark are another potential stressor for kids in this age group. Older kids who begin dating also may find that this causes stress.

Stress is often caused by work, but adults are not the only ones vulnerable to stress. Various life events can trigger stress in kids. Parents can do their best to recognize potential stressors and help kids manage stress in a healthy, safe way.

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Look for warning signs of drugs or alcohol

Courtesy of Partnership for Drug-Free Kids www.drugfree.org

How to Find Out if Your Child is Using Drugs or Alcohol

- **Use Your Nose.** Have a real, face-to-face conversation when your son or daughter comes home after socializing with friends. If there has been drinking or smoking, the smell will be on their breath, on clothing and in their hair.
- **Look Them in the Eyes.** When your child gets home after going out with her friends, take a close look. Pay attention to his or her eyes. Eyes will be red and heavy-lidded, with constricted pupils if they've used marijuana. Pupils will be dilated, and he or she may have difficulty focusing if they've been drinking. In addition, red, flushed color to the face and cheeks can also be a sign of drinking.
- **Watch for Mood Changes.** How does your teen act after a night out with friends? Are they loud and obnoxious, or laughing hysterically at nothing? Unusually clumsy to the point of stumbling into furniture and walls, tripping over their own feet and knocking things over? Sullen, withdrawn, and unusually tired and slack-eyed for the hour of night? Do they look queasy and stumble into the bathroom? These are all signs that they could have been drinking, using marijuana or other drugs.
- **Monitor Driving and the Car.** Your teen's car and driving habits can offer clues as well. Is driving more reckless when he or she's coming home after being with friends? Are there new, unexplained dents? If you're suspicious, examine the inside of the car too. Does it smell like smoke or alcohol fumes? Are there any bottles, pipes, bongs, or other drug paraphernalia rolling around on the floor or hidden in the glove box? If you find evidence of drug use, be sure to prepare for the conversation ahead.
- **Keep an eye out for deceit or secretive-ness.** Are their weekend plans starting to sound fishy? Are they being vague about where they're going? Can they describe the movie they supposedly just saw? They say parents will be at the party they're attending, but can't give you a phone number and come home acting intoxicated? They get in way past curfew or estimated time with an

endless string of excuses? When excuses fail, do they respond to your inquiries and concern by telling you that it's none of your business? If these ring true, something is wrong and it's time to take action.

Should You Search Their Room?

The limits you set with your child do not stop at their bedroom door. If you notice concerning changes in behavior, unusual odors wafting from their room (like marijuana or cigarette smoke), smells to mask other smells like incense or air fresheners, or other warning signs, it's important to find out what's going on behind that "KEEP OUT" sign.

One note of caution, however. Be prepared to explain your reasons for a search, whether or not you decide to tell them about it beforehand. You can let them know it's out of concern for their health and safety. If you discover that your kid is not drinking or doing drugs, this could be a good time to find out if there's something else that may need to be addressed.

Kids come up with some crafty places to conceal alcohol, drugs, and drug paraphernalia. Some possible hiding spots include:

- Dresser drawers beneath or between clothes
- Desk drawers
- CD/DVD/Tape/Video cases
- Small boxes – jewelry, pencil, etc.
- Backpacks/duffle bags
- Under a bed
- In a plant, buried in the dirt
- In between books on a bookshelf
- Inside books with pages cut out
- Makeup cases – inside fake lipstick tubes or compacts
- Under a loose plank in floor boards
- Inside over-the-counter medicine containers (Tylenol, Advil, etc.)
- Inside empty candy bags such as M&Ms or Skittles

Don't overlook your teen's cell phone or other digital devices. Do you recognize their frequent contacts? Do recent messages or social media posts hint at drug use or contradict what they've told you?

If your search turns up evidence of drug use, prepare for the conversation ahead and do not be deterred by the argument of invaded privacy.

Stand by your decision to search and the limits you've set.

It's never too early to talk about drugs! Tips when talking with 5-8 year olds

Contributed by www.drugfree.org Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

Five - eight year-olds are still tied to family and eager to please, but they're also beginning to explore their individuality. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 5- to 8-year-old child:

SCENARIO

Your child has expressed curiosity about the pills she sees you take every day — and the other bottles in the medicine cabinet

WHAT TO SAY

Just because it's in a family's medicine cabinet doesn't mean that it is safe for you to take. Even if your friends say it's okay, say, "No, my parents won't let me take something that doesn't have my name on the bottle."

Tips for Conversations with Your Elementary School Child

Talk to your kids about the drug-related messages they receive through advertisements, the news media and entertainment sources. Ask your kids how they feel about the things they've heard — you'll learn a great deal about what they're thinking.

Keep your discussions about substances focused on the present — long-term consequences are too distant to have any meaning. Talk about the differences between the medicinal uses and illegal uses of drugs, and how drugs can negatively impact the families and friends of people who use

them.

Set clear rules and explain the reasons for your rules. If you use tobacco or alcohol, be mindful of the message you are sending to your children.

Work on problem solving: Help them find long-lasting solutions to homework trouble, a fight with a friend, or in dealing with a bully. Be sure to point out that quick fixes are not long-term solutions.

Give your kids the power to escape from situations that make them feel bad. Make sure they know that they shouldn't stay in a place that makes them feel uncomfortable or bad about themselves. Also let them know that they don't need to stick with friends who don't support them.

Get to know your child's friends — and their friends' parents. Check in once in awhile to make sure they are giving their children the same kinds of messages you give your children.



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What is gaming disorder?

Billions of people across the globe are gaming enthusiasts. A recent ESA survey showed that more than 214 million Americans are playing video games, which can help develop familial bonds. Furthermore, with more time spent at home, video games may be a way to

pass the time and maintain social interaction with friends and other family members. However, excessive gaming may be too much of a good thing. In 2018, the World Health Organization added "gaming disorder" to their International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), which

is the latest list of diseases and medical conditions that health professionals use to diagnose issues affecting their patients. According to the ICD-11, individuals with gaming disorder have trouble managing the amount of time that they spend playing video games. In addition, gaming may be put ahead of other activities. Over time, excessive gaming may lead to other negative effects, including behavioral issues akin to other addictive behaviors, such as alcohol use and gambling. The WHO says for gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the pattern of behavior must be severe enough to result in significant impairment to family, personal, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas for at least 12 months.

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PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

Youth suicide, know the warning signs

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The Jason Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit whose mission statement is dedicated to the prevention of the “Silent Epidemic” of youth suicide through educational and awareness programs that equip young people, educators/youth workers and parents with the tools and resources to help identify and assist at-risk youth.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of preventable death in our nation today. We lose an average of more than 130 young people each week to this tragedy that can be prevented.

How can it be prevented you may ask? The Jason Foundation, Inc. believes that education is the key to prevention. The Jason Foundation’s programs and services are in response to this belief. Our nation should be familiar with the warning signs associated with suicide, suicide facts and statistics, and how to find help for at-risk youth. Together, we can save lives!

Remember: Never be reluctant to get involved and always take any child/adolescent’s desire or intent to harm themselves seriously. If you suspect a young person of suicidal ideation, get them to professional help immediately. Suicide is Preventable.

WARNING SIGNS

Almost everyone who attempts or completes suicide has given warning signs through their words or behaviors. Do not ignore any suicide threats. The following statements may indicate serious suicidal feelings.

“I’d be better off dead.”
“I won’t be bothering you much longer.”
“You’ll be better off without me around.”
“I hate my life.”
“I am going to kill myself.”
Suicide threats are not always verbal.

Depression is one of the leading causes of suicide attempts. Mental or addictive disorders are associated with 90 percent of suicide. One in ten youth suffer from mental illness serious enough to be impaired, yet fewer than 20 percent receive treatment. Depression can be exhibited in many ways including the following which are detailed in more depth:

- Sudden, abrupt changes in personality
- Expressions of hopelessness and despair
- Declining grades and school performance
- Lack of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Increased irritability and aggressiveness
- Withdrawal from family, friends and relationships
- Lack of hygiene
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits

Other warning signs include:

- Anger, increased irritability
- Lack of interest
- Sudden increase/decrease in appetite
- Sudden changes in appearance
- Dwindling academic performance
- Preoccupation with death and suicide such as essays or poems about death, artwork or drawings depicting death, social media posts or comments or talking a lot about death or dying.
- Previous suicide attempts
- Final arrangements - once the decision has been made to end their life, some young people begin making final arrangements. Giving away prized or favorite possessions Putting their affairs in order Saying good-bye to family and friends, making funeral arrangements

RISK FACTORS

Suicide does not typically have a sudden onset. There are a number of stressors that can contribute to a youth’s anxiety and unhappiness, increasing the possibility of a suicide attempt. A number of them are described below.

- Depression, mental illness and substance abuse One of the most telling risk factors for youth is mental illness. Mental or addictive disorders are associated with 90 percent of suicides. One in ten youth suffer from mental illness serious enough to be impaired, yet fewer than 20 percent receive treatment. In fact, 60 percent of those who complete suicide suffer from depression. Alcohol and drug use, which clouds judgment, lowers inhibitions, and worsens depression, are associated with 50-67 percent of suicides.
- Aggression and fighting -recent research has identified a connection between interpersonal violence and suicide. Suicide is associated with fighting for both males and females, across all ethnic groups, and for youth living in urban, suburban, and rural areas.
- Home environment - Within the home, a lack of cohesion, high levels of violence and conflict, a lack of parental support and alienation from and within the family.
- Community environment - youth with high levels of exposure to community violence are at serious risk for self-destructive behavior. This can occur when a youth models his or her own behavior after what is experienced in the community. Additionally, more youth are growing up without making meaningful connections with adults, and therefore are not getting the guidance they need to help them cope with their daily lives.
- School environment - youth who are struggling

with classes, perceive their teachers as not understanding them or caring about them, or have poor relationships with their peers have increased vulnerability.

- Previous attempts - youth who have attempted suicide are at risk to do it again. In fact, they are eight times more likely than youth who have never attempted suicide to make another suicide attempt.
- Cultural factors - changes in gender roles and expectations, issues of conformity and assimilation, and feelings of isolation and victimization can all increase the stress levels and vulnerability of individuals. Additionally, in some cultures (particularly Asian and Pacific cultures), suicide may be seen as a rational response to shame.
- Family history/stresses - a history of mental illness and suicide among immediate family members place youth at greater risk for suicide. Exacerbating these circumstances are changes in family structure such as death, divorce, remarriage, moving to a new city, and financial instability.
- Self-mutilation or self-harm behaviors include head banging, cutting, burning, biting, erasing, and digging at wounds. These behaviors are becoming increasingly common among youth, especially female youth. While self-injury typically signals the occurrence of broader problems, the reason for this behavior can vary from peer group pressure to severe emotional disturbance. Although help should be sought for any individual who is causing self-harm, an appropriate response is crucial. Because most self-mutilation behaviors are not suicide attempts, it is important to be cautious when reaching out to the youth and not to make assumptions.
- Situation crisis - approximately 40 percent of youth suicides are associated with an identifiable precipitating event, such as the death of a loved one, loss of a valued relationship, parental divorce, or sexual abuse. Typically, these events coincide with other risk factors.

The Jason Foundation has partnered with Crisis Text Line©. The Crisis Text Line is a free 24/7 text line where trained crisis counselors support individuals in crisis.

Text “Jason” to 741741 to speak with a compassionate, trained Crisis Counselor. Confidential support 24/7, for free. The Crisis Counselor “helps you move from a hot moment to a cool calm to stay safe and healthy using effective active listening and suggested referrals – all through text message, using Crisis Text Line’s secure platform.”

Visit Crisis Text Line’s website for additional information. www.crisistextline.org.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis, call 911.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- American Association of Suicidology
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- Center for Disease Control: Suicide
- Center for Disease Control: Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System
- The Jed Foundation
- Kid Central TN
- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)
- National Council for Suicide Prevention
- National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (PDF)
- Samaritans USA
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)
- Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network
- The Trevor Project
- Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program

If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis, call 911.

IS YOUR TEEN USING?

The following is provided by
www.drugfree.org

There’s no easy way to figure out if your teen is using drugs or alcohol. As you’ll see, many of the signs and symptoms of teen substance abuse listed below are also, at times, typical adolescent behavior. Many are also symptoms of mental health issues, including depression or anxiety disorders.

If you’ve noticed any of the changes related to substance abuse listed below, don’t be afraid to come right out and ask your teen direct questions like “Have you been offered drugs?” If yes, “What did you do?” or “Have you been drinking or using drugs?” While no parent wants to hear a “yes” response to these questions, be prepared for it. Decide, in advance, how you’ll respond to a “yes”. Make sure you reassure your child that you’re looking out for him or her, and that you only want the best for his or her future.

Of course, not all teens are going to fess up to drug or alcohol use, and a “no” could also mean your child is in need of help for mental health issues. That’s why experts strongly recommend that you consider getting a professional assessment of your child with a pediatrician or child psychologist to find out what’s going on. In the case of teen substance abuse, don’t be afraid to err on the side of caution. Teaming up with professionals to help your teen is the best way to make sure he or she has a healthy future.

Personal Appearance

Messy, shows lack of caring for appearance
Poor hygiene
Red, flushed cheeks or face
Track marks on arms or legs (or long sleeves in warm weather to hide marks)
Burns or soot on fingers or lips (from “joints” or “roaches” burning down)

Personal Habits or Actions

Clenching teeth
Smell of smoke or other unusual smells on breath or on clothes
Chewing gum or mints to cover up breath
Heavy use of over-the-counter preparations to reduce eye reddening, nasal irritation, or bad breath
Frequently breaks curfew
Cash flow problems
Reckless driving, car accidents, or unexplained dents in the car
Avoiding eye contact
Locked doors
Going out every night
Secretive phone calls
“Munchies” or sudden appetite

Behavioral Issues Associated with Teen Substance Abuse
Change in relationships with family members or friends
Loss of inhibitions
Mood changes or emotional instabil-

ity
Loud, obnoxious behavior
Laughing at nothing
Unusually clumsy, stumbling, lack of coordination, poor balance
Sullen, withdrawn, depressed
Unusually tired
Silent, uncommunicative
Hostility, anger, uncooperative behavior
Deceitful or secretive
Makes endless excuses
Decreased Motivation
Lethargic movement
Unable to speak intelligibly, slurred speech, or rapid-fire speech
Inability to focus
Hyperactivity
Unusually elated
Periods of sleeplessness or high energy, followed by long periods of “catch up” sleep
Disappearances for long periods of time

School- or Work-Related Issues

Truancy or loss of interest in school-work
Loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies, or sports
Failure to fulfill responsibilities at school or work
Complaints from teachers or co-workers
Reports of intoxication at school or work

Health Issues Related to Teen Substance Abuse

Nosebleeds
Runny nose, not caused by allergies or a cold
Frequent sickness
Sores, spots around mouth
Queasy, nauseous
Seizures
Vomiting
Wetting lips or excessive thirst (known as “cotton mouth”)
Sudden or dramatic weight loss or gain
Skin abrasions/bruises
Accidents or injuries
Depression
Headaches
Sweatiness

Home- or Car-Related

Disappearance of prescription of over-the-counter pills
Missing alcohol or cigarettes
Disappearance of money or valuables
Smell in the car or bottles, pipes, or bongs on floor or in glove box
Appearance of unusual containers or wrappers, or seeds left on surfaces used to clean marijuana, like Frisbees,
Appearance of unusual drug apparatuses, including pipes, rolling papers, small medicine bottles, eye drops, butane lighters, or makeshift smoking devices, like bongs made out of toilet paper rolls and aluminum foil
Hidden stashes of alcohol

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We LOVE our clients! Here are some of their testimonials:

I couldn't have done it without your staff. You all did an outstanding job. Thank you.
~ Nancy S. • Littleton, NC

You provided guidance and assistance when I didn't know where to turn. I really appreciated your services and the level of concern and care.
~ Stanley R.

Please pass along our thanks to everyone at Able Home Care who helped our family through this process. You all were the ray of sunshine on a cloudy day.
~ Ellen S.

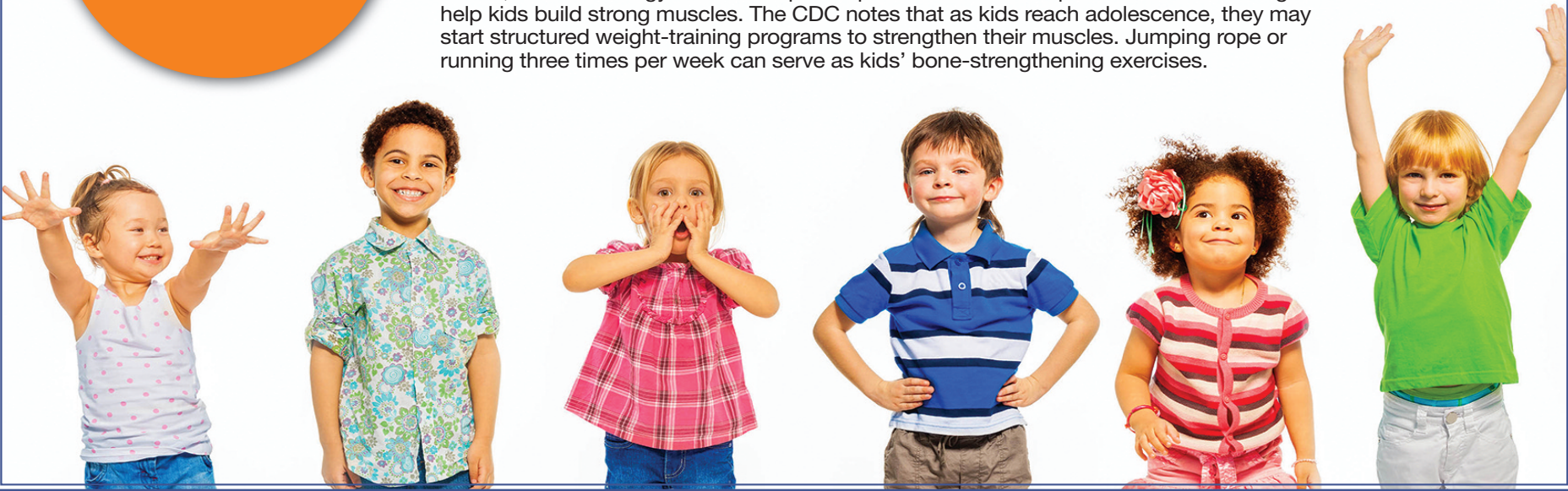
Thank you once again for the fine service your agency has provided for my mother. From arranging for the extra help she needed to the wonderful compassionate caregivers that you staffed.
~ Eddie F. • Roanoke Rapids, NC

Thank you so much for your kindness to me and giving me such good help. God Bless you in all you do. You have made the last few years so much easier for me.
~ Callie G. • Tarboro, NC

Kids Health

Did You Know?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that children and adolescents get 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day. The CDC advises that such physical activity should include aerobic activity and muscle and bone strengthening exercises. Aerobic activity should take up most of kids' daily physical activities and can include moderate activities, such as brisk walking, or more intense activities like running. Parents should make sure kids include some vigorous aerobic activity in their physical activity routines at least three days per week. Muscle strengthening activities do not mean parents should get their youngsters in the gym as soon as possible. Rather, activities like gymnastics or push-ups done three times per week can be enough to help kids build strong muscles. The CDC notes that as kids reach adolescence, they may start structured weight-training programs to strengthen their muscles. Jumping rope or running three times per week can serve as kids' bone-strengthening exercises.



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