



PREPARING OUR STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS

While students are enjoying the end of summer, our schools are preparing to welcome kids back. As a means to help our kids be successful within their school environment, we can't ignore the emotional, mental and behavioral health of our students. Our youth face a multitude of transitions and changes as they grow. The positive guidance and support of adults is critical to their success. SCIP recognizes the valuable role that parents, schools and our community plays in the lives of our youth. As the African Proverb goes, "It takes a village to raise a child". Protecting our youth from at-risk behaviors that may lead to adverse health outcomes takes a community of support. One of the best ways we can help our kids make healthy choices is to stay informed of issues that may adversely affect the lives of our youth. Education, awareness, communication, community connections and collaboration are all essential elements in initiatives geared at keeping our students safe and healthy. As your student starts back to school this fall, we want to encourage you to take advantage of resources such as SCIP, to help you stay informed.



About SCIP

School Community Intervention and Prevention is a program designed to bring together families, school and the community to support student behavioral and emotional health by addressing both individual and environmental elements that influence youth behavior.

SCIP works with schools to form a front line of early identification, intervention and connection to resources for students and their families struggling with mental, emotional and behavioral health issues.

When a student is displaying concerning behavior either at school, at home, or in the community, the student can be referred to the SCIP Team within the student's school. The SCIP Team will work to support the student and his/her family by connecting them with services and resources both within the school building and outside of the school environment.

SCIP collaborates with community behavioral health agencies that can provide screenings at no cost for the student.

For more information please contact your school's SCIP Team Leader or visit www.scipnebraska.com.

Cyber Safety: The Influence of Social Media & Technology

In today's digital world, understanding the influence of social media and technology on our youth is especially important. Not only is the age of adolescence a developmentally vulnerable stage, but teenagers are also amongst the heaviest users of social networking sites. The ability to access such social media sites as Facebook, Instagram and snapchat via smartphones and other mobile devices has made it even easier for kids to connect to the digital world. While there are benefits to social media and the use of technology (enhance communication, facilitate social interaction and help develop technical skills), it is important for parents to likewise understand the risks. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, adolescents limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure puts them at greater risk. Problems that are worthy of awareness include cyberbullying, sexting, privacy issues and sleep deprivation.

What Parents and Caregivers Can Do:

- Talk to children and adolescents about their online use and the specific issues that today's kids face such as cyberbullying, sexting and privacy concerns.
- Become educated about the many technologies and social media sites youth are using.
- Develop a family online-use plan, with an emphasis on digital citizenship and healthy behavior.
- Supervise online activities through active participation and communication (monitoring software is available, but actively talking with youth about their use may be a more powerful influence).
- Instill in youth that using technology and having access to electronic devices is a privilege that requires a level of responsibility.
- Establish "electronic curfews".



Understanding Anxiety in Children and Adolescents

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorders among children and adolescents, yet they often go untreated. Anxiety is a natural human reaction and serves as an “alarm system” that’s activated whenever we perceive danger or a threat. While some anxiety is normal, anxiety that’s too strong or happens a lot can become overwhelming, especially for children and adolescents. Anxiety can interfere with a young person’s ability to get things done, academic success and peer relationships. When anxiety begins to overcome a child or adolescent’s ability to function and enjoy life, they may be suffering from an anxiety disorder.

Signs

All kids will experience anxiety in certain situations and it should be noted that most, even those who live through traumatic events, will not go on to develop anxiety disorders. Those who do, however, will seem anxious and have one or more of the following signs:

- Excessive worry most days of the week, for weeks on end
- Trouble sleeping at night or sleepiness during the day
- Restlessness or fatigue during waking hours
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches, muscle tension)
- Avoidance of school or activities

Causes/Risk Factors

There is not one answer that points to the cause of anxiety disorders but experts believe several things may contribute including genetics, brain biochemistry, an overactive fight-flight response, stressful life circumstances and learned behavior. Life events can lead to anxiety in childhood and later in life. The death of a parent or loved one, divorce, history of abuse and major life changes (such as a move) can trigger anxiety in youth.

Some of the more recent research on childhood anxiety focuses on the role of caregivers as it relates to risk factors and treatment. In an article titled, “Brighter Futures for Anxious Kids”, the American Psychological Association highlights the importance of caregivers understanding how their own behaviors and responses to their child’s anxiety, can either help or hinder their symptoms. As parents, self-reflection can be difficult. Our natural instincts are to protect and comfort our children, but sometimes the best of intentions can lead to unfavorable outcomes. This article and other helpful resources can be found at <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/03/anxious-kids.aspx>.

Getting Help

- Rather than attempt to minimize anxiety, utilize resources to help a child manage it
- Respect feelings and the child’s fears, but don’t empower them– listen, be empathetic and encourage
- Express positive, but realistic expectations
- Don’t avoid things just because they make a child anxious
- Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety
- Think things through– talk with the child about how they might handle different situations that create anxiety.

A therapist can look at the symptoms, diagnose the specific anxiety disorder and create a plan to help a child cope. While these disorders can cause considerable distress to a child or teenagers life, the prognosis is good. A key in helping youth overcome anxiety is to acknowledge the problem in a supportive, nonjudgmental way. Parents and schools can work together to be patient and positive in helping anxious youth find new ways to cope.

Keep Kids Safe from the Dangers of Substance Use through Awareness

Together, parents, school and the community play an important role in preventing drug and alcohol use amongst youth. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), parents strongly influence their kid's attitudes and behaviors surrounding substance use. Alcohol, marijuana (including marijuana extracts) and prescription drugs continue to be three of the most prevalently used substances of abuse among our youth. Understanding why our youth may turn to drugs or alcohol is an important step in prevention and intervention. While some kids choose to experiment with drugs and alcohol out of peer pressure or curiosity, others may turn to using substances as a means of self-management or self-medication to deal with underlying issues. For example, youth may find a temporary relief from the symptoms of depression, anxiety or stress, through the use of drugs or alcohol. Young adults with undetected, undiagnosed or untreated emotional or mental health disorders have a higher likelihood of experimenting with substances. Issues of boredom and avoiding the challenges and problems of growing up can also be a reason why youth turn to drugs or alcohol. If you have concerns that a youth may be experimenting with substances, it is important to ask "what does the drug do for you?" as a means to better assess the problem. Talking to our kids about substance use isn't always easy, but it is crucial.

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

- Stay informed and educated on the latest drug trends amongst youth.
- Lock up alcohol and prescription medication.
- Engage in open dialogue with your child about substance abuse and risks associated with substance use.
- Set a "family policy" around drug use and underage drinking (i.e. expectations, consequences, communication).
- Talk with the parents of your child's peers and know who your child spends time with—peers are the leading influence in youth substance use/abuse.
- Help your child plan how to deal with social pressures to drink or try other substances.
- Talk with your child about important issues like anxiety, depression, relationships and academic concerns. Teen substance use can be due to another underlying factor, such as a means to cope with stress.
- Assist your child in utilizing positive coping skills.
- Partner with your child's school and other community resources.
- Promote Protective Factors: characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact.
 - ◇ Examples Include:
 - * Parental involvement
 - * Positive peer groups
 - * Involvement in after school activities
 - * Positive relationships with caring adults
 - * School connectedness

Alcohol:

Nationally, as reported by the CDC, alcohol is the most commonly used substance of abuse among America's youth. The most common ways for students to acquire alcohol are from their own home, from a friend, a friend's house, or by theft.

Recent trends in teenage consumption of alcohol include: binge drinking, mixing alcohol with other substances (i.e. prescription pills), flavored liquors, and candy soaked in liquor (i.e. gummy bears in vodka). Acute Alcohol Intoxication is one of the many risks associated with binge drinking. Knowing the symptoms of Acute Alcohol Intoxication and how to intervene can save lives. Despite the use of alcohol amongst youth and the risks associated with such use, there is hope. Everyone can play a role in preventing underage drinking but parents are pivotal players in reducing alcohol consumption amongst youth. 83% of teens say their parents are the leading influence in their decision to not drink. It is critical for parents to have discussions with their children on alcohol use and the risks of underage drinking. By talking with children early and often, parents can play a role in their child's choice to not drink.

Prescription Drugs:

There is a misperception among some of our youth that it is safer to use prescription drugs to get high rather than use illegal drugs, because they are prescribed by a doctor or dentist and dispensed by a pharmacist. The fact is, any use of prescription drugs without a doctor's recommendation can be as dangerous as using illegal drugs. Improper use can have serious health effects including addiction and overdose. Prescription Drug Abuse is defined as: taking a medication prescribed to someone else, taking your own prescription in a way not intended by a doctor or dentist or taking a medication to get high.

Most abused prescription drugs fall under three categories: Pain Killers (i.e. OxyContin, Vicodin, Codeine), Depressants (i.e. Valium or Xanax) or Stimulants (i.e. Adderall, Ritalin). Many teens are accessing medications from their own medicine cabinets at home, from friends or from relatives. Effects of prescription drug misuse and abuse varies depending on the drug but combining multiple medications or combining with alcohol can be especially dangerous. It is important to talk with youth about the proper use of prescription medications and the dangers associated with misuse.

Marijuana: Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug by teens. When marijuana use begins in the teen years, it can have a significant impact on brain development. THC alters the ability of the hippocampus (a brain area related to learning and memory), to communicate effectively with other brain regions. This can lead to impairments in learning, memory, perception and judgement.

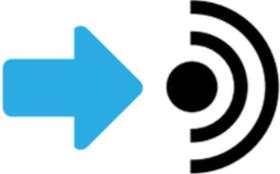
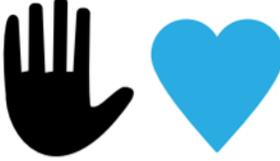
Compared to those who don't use marijuana, those who use heavily more often report:

- Lower life satisfaction
- Poorer mental health
- Poorer physical health
- More relationship problems

The amount of THC (the chemical in marijuana that results in feeling high) in marijuana has been increasing steadily over the past few decades. With increased potency comes increased health risks and harmful reactions. Be aware of new trends in marijuana use, such as "dabbing", also referred to as marijuana extracts. Extracts can come in various forms including a wax and oil. On average, regular marijuana has a THC content of 12-13%; the typical dab has a THC content of more than 50% and some extracts are as high as 80%. These extracts can deliver extremely large amounts of THC and have sent some users to the Emergency Room.

7 KEYS

TO HEART-TO-HEART PARENTING

- 1 Listen with an open heart 
- 2 Set clear boundaries and expectations 
- 3 Enforce firm, fair consequences 
- 4 Be consistent 
- 5 Understand that every teen is different 
- 6 Work toward solutions, not just fixes 
- 7 Encourage your teen's independence 

TalkAboutAlcohol.org

To learn more about the “heart to heart” parenting style, visit www.talkaboutalcohol.org. This interactive website offers resources to help parents have meaningful and effective interactions with their teens about alcohol use and other important issues.