

## Cultivating Hope to Improve Mental Health

Hope can play an important role in mental health and overall wellbeing. While we often think of hope as an emotion, theorists and researchers in positive psychology argue that hope is a thought pattern that is action oriented and a skill that can be learned and enhanced. Late psychologist, Charles R. Snyder, developed the Hope Theory and paved the way for much of the current research on hope. He defined hope as “the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (American Psychological Association). At the heart of Hope Theory is identifying steps to achieve attainable goals and working towards them. In Hope Theory, “pathways” are strategies individuals develop to meet their goals and “agency” refers to the willpower or belief that one can work toward a goal to enact change (even in the face of setbacks and challenges). A component of hope under this theory is learning to reframe barriers as challenges to overcome rather than permanent roadblocks.



How does hope help improve mental health outcomes? The absence of hope can lead to feelings of helplessness and despair resulting in negative thought patterns. Under the premise of Hope Theory is the idea that goal setting can help give meaning and direction to life, helping to foster a sense of purpose and positive outlook towards the future. Experts note that even the smallest of milestones or goal achievement can enhance mental wellbeing and boost self-esteem.

Hope can serve as a healthy coping mechanism when facing challenges and impact mental health in several ways including increased resilience and lower levels of depression and anxiety. Other benefits include:

- Positive emotions
- Strong sense of purpose
- Enhanced ability to socialize and connect (leading to less loneliness)
- Increased concentration
- Higher energy levels
- Increased motivation
- Increased self-confidence

Fostering hope can be challenging, especially when faced with overwhelming situations or experiencing a mental health condition such as depression or suicidal ideation. Thus, experts note that it is important to practice building hope when feeling well so that those skills can be accessed when facing challenges. Support is a critical factor in the development of hope, especially for our youth. Adults can help youth cultivate hope by modeling behaviors and attitudes that support hope and well-being. Below are additional ways that adults can help youth build hope during times of struggle:

- **Validate their feelings-** actively listen and acknowledge their struggles without dismissing their emotions.
- **Positive self-talk-** encourage youth to identify positive qualities about themselves and practice self-affirmations.
- **Encourage small, achievable goal setting-** help kids and teens to break down large challenges into smaller, more manageable steps to build a sense of accomplishment.
- **Promote mindfulness-** teach relaxation techniques like deep breathing or journaling to manage stress and anxiety.
- **Create positive environments-** build safe and supportive spaces at home and school where youth feel comfortable sharing their feelings.
- **Normalize setbacks-** working to achieve a goal often comes with challenges and setbacks. Kids may need guidance and assistance in processing and learning to pivot through obstacles and barriers.
- **Empowerment-** Encourage youth to take ownership of their mental health by making healthy choices and advocating for their needs.

On a final note, it's important to monitor the mental health of our youth. Professional support and treatment may be an important step. Therapeutic support can be helpful in assisting young people with developing coping skills and hope building strategies as a means to improve wellbeing.

References: American Psychological Association; Hope Research Center; Human Flourishing Lab; National Institute of Health; Psychology Today

# NICOTINE

## The Ever-Evolving Drug Targeting Youth

Did you know, youth targeted tobacco prevention and education efforts started in the 1980's? Over time, these prevention efforts led to significantly lowered tobacco use among youth.

According to the MTF (Monitoring the Future) annual youth survey, youth reported cigarette use among middle and high schoolers in the 1990's at more than 25%, whereas now usage is around 3.5%.

Health concerns, along with taste and smell, were three of the main reasons youth gave for not using. It appeared we had truly turned the corner on the use of tobacco/nicotine use among youth.

Unfortunately, tobacco companies did not idly sit back while they continued to lose their current users more quickly than they were able to replace them with new users.

The tobacco companies took the feedback from youth as to why they were choosing not to use and used it to develop a more desirable product aimed at youth as well as adults: e-cigarettes/vaping devices, with the Juul being one of the most popular devices youth sought out.

With vaping devices, there was minimal to no lingering smell on clothes, or in spaces where youth would use these products, such as cars, home or even at school. In addition, there were dozens, if not hundreds of kid-friendly fruity and sweet flavors, eliminating the bad taste smoking often left in the mouths of users. And as we know, these products were advertised as healthy alternatives to smoking cigarettes. No cancer-causing tar or secondhand smoke effects.

Consequently, we did indeed find out there were some very serious and life-threatening health risks associated with vaping. With that, we once again provided education and targeted prevention efforts about vaping and its dangers. Fortunately, there has been steady decline in vaping among youth over the last 5 years.

While this is good news, we have now begun to see an increase in the use of nicotine pouches among youth. Nicotine pouches have been around for over 20 years. The pouches seem to be the next big trend in nicotine use since vaping. The use of nicotine pouches has exploded as the reported use of nicotine pouches has more than doubled from 2023 to 2024 among youth.

Unlike vaping, these products are allowed to have all sorts of flavors that range from mint flavors, fruity flavors, or even coffee flavors. Several of these nicotine pouch brands are packaged to look like breath mint containers.

And while nicotine pouches do not contain the same kinds of cigarette carcinogens, they still contain other harmful substances, such as:

- **Nicotine**-A highly addictive substance that can increase blood pressure, heart rate, and risk of stroke.
- **Flavors**-Some flavors contain chemicals that have been linked to cancer or other health problems.
- **Heavy metals**-Bits of heavy metals
  - Lead and chromium that have been found in some nicotine pouches.

Furthermore, while there is limited research available on the link between nicotine pouches and cancer, there are some studies that suggest that these nicotine pouches may increase the risk of certain types of oral cancer, such as:

- **Oral mucosal carcinoma**

- **Glandular salivary gland cancer**

ZYN is one of the most popular brands but there are dozens of brands with new brands continuing to emerge.

See below three nicotine pouch brand packaged containers in relation to the breath mint packaged container (shown on the right).



And while we continue education and prevention efforts, we must also focus on intervention.

What can we do to help a teen/adolescent that is addicted to nicotine quit? First, be supportive, encouraging and understanding. Quitting nicotine is not easy. After all, studies show nicotine is as addictive as heroin.

Here are some simple techniques that might be helpful to someone who is addicted to nicotine and wants to quit:

- **Plan for quitting nicotine**-quitting nicotine isn't easy, but you can make a plan to help you stick to your goal. Learn what to expect when you experience withdrawal symptoms such as cravings, irritability, lack of concentration etc. and what might work to offset the negative symptoms.
- **Identify triggers**-for instance, waking up and going to bed are common times for someone to use. Other common times people tend to use are just before or after eating as well as times when people are feeling stressed.
- **Small, Simple Distractions**-nicotine cravings tend to intensify and grow stronger the more a person focuses/thinks about using. Take your mind off the temptation through small tasks like drawing/doodling, writing/texting, playing a board or card game, or listening to music.
- **Exercise**-moving around and getting physical exercise can release the same kind of chemicals that your brain is craving from nicotine. This can be as simple as taking a walk, going on a bike ride, playing catch, etc.

Listed below are some links that focus on helping teens quit nicotine/tobacco use:

- <https://teen.smokefree.gov/>
- <https://teen.smokefree.gov/quit-vaping>
- <https://truthinitiative.org/curriculum>

In addition to the resource links above, below are additional links to sources referenced for this article that contain more information for parents on teen nicotine use and prevention.

<https://monitoringthefuture.org/>  
<https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/topic/emerging-tobacco-products>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/tbacco/php/data-statistics/youth-data-tobacco/index.html>  
<https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/smoking-facts/health-effects/emerging-products>

## Childhood ADHD: What it is and How it Manifests

Once upon a time not all that long ago, children who struggled with symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) were shamed for their “restlessness.” However, recent mental health trends reflect a public shift in perception and awareness towards this complex and legitimate mental health condition. According to one national survey of parents conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in 2022, approximately “7 million (11.4%) of U.S. children ages 3-17 have ever been diagnosed with ADHD.” Although stigma against the disorder still exists, this data shows an increase of 1 million diagnoses since 2016, and it reflects a change in attitude that is due, in part, to new research and education.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a “developmental disorder” characterized by an ongoing pattern of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Although there are many variations on its manifestation, the disorder can be categorized into three primary types: 1) hyperactive/impulsive type, 2) inattentive type, or 3) combination hyperactivity-inattentive type. The National Institute of Mental Health defines these terms below:



- **Inattention:** “difficulty paying attention, keeping on task or staying organized”
- **Hyperactivity:** “often moving around (including during inappropriate times), feeling restless, or talking excessively”
- **Impulsivity:** “interrupting, intruding on others, or having trouble waiting one’s turn”

Although symptoms of ADHD can and likely will appear in children who do not have the disorder, a child who fulfills the criteria for an ADHD diagnosis will consistently experience impairment associated with these symptoms across several different environments – whether it is at home, in school, or at other extracurricular activities. The prevalence of these symptoms can make it difficult for children suffering from ADHD to successfully accomplish tasks, maintain grades and manage healthy relationships. Additionally, these symptoms can affect an adolescent’s ability to control impulses and may lead them to engage in risky sexual or substance use behaviors.

As the research shows, there is a clear disparity between the number of young boys being diagnosed with ADHD (15%) and the number of young girls who are diagnosed (8%), but one article written by NPR suggests that “girls are becoming more commonly diagnosed with ADHD compared to boys than they had been in the past.” This increase in diagnosis reflects a shift in perception regarding the ways that ADHD manifests itself in girls, who are much more likely to seem “inattentive” than their male counterparts; they might daydream or “hyper-focus on a particular task that” is not “the task they need to be focused on.” Boys, on the other hand, are,

according to the research, often more “hyperactive” and will be more likely to engage in physically dangerous behavior.

**Some other common symptoms of ADHD in boys include:**

- Disruptive, aggressive and defensive behaviors
- Excessive physical movement, such as running around or climbing
- Angry outbursts and physical restlessness
- Insensitivity

**Some common symptoms of ADHD in girls include:**

- Failure to maintain close attention to details or making careless mistakes
- Has difficulty sustaining attention and does not appear to listen
- Struggles to follow through with instruction / difficulty with organization
- Difficulty concentrating on one topic at a time

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, ADHD often co-occurs with other behavioral disorders, and it affects the child or adolescent’s ability to sleep, learn, manage anxiety and cope with any depressive symptoms. A study conducted by the Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology reports that “nearly 78% of children diagnosed with ADHD had at least one other diagnosed disorder”; these include Autism, Depression, and behavioral conduct conditions. If left untreated, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA) reports that ADHD may lead to significant long-term consequences, such as low self-esteem, irritability, frustration, and issues with academic or work performance.

Young women left untreated in childhood may experience overwhelming feelings of despair and/or inadequacy in response to their perceived lack of ability to manage their symptoms. They may become impatient with themselves or others and lose motivation to complete difficult tasks, and much like in the case for men, their symptoms may worsen as they struggle to cope with comorbidities.

However, proper ADHD management is proven to “improve focus, motivation, and communication” for patients who seek and receive effective treatment. ADHD medications, such as Adderall and Ritalin, are commonly used to increase the supply of neurotransmitters – chemicals like dopamine and norepinephrine – in the brain that, according to the Cleveland Clinic, play essential roles in one’s “ability to pay attention, think and stay motivated.” These medications, which are most often stimulants, are used to manage “executive dysfunction” and help the individual ignore the kinds of distractions that their ADHD attempts to latch onto.

National shortages in ADHD medications have affected how many children are being properly treated for the disorder, and despite the safety of the medications, many parents remain concerned about the long-term effects of giving their children these medications. Most doctors agree that ADHD medication should only be taken in combination with the administration of regular behavioral health therapies (such as CBT – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), which will consistently “target” daily symptoms of inattention or hyperactivity and teach youth how to develop the necessary skills to improve their focus, planning, organization and problem-solving.

For more information regarding the signs and symptoms of ADHD in young boys or young girls, please see the [Cleveland Clinic’s “How are ADHD Symptoms Different in Boys and Girls?”](#)

For more information regarding ADHD management and therapy strategies, please see the [Attention Deficit Disorder Association’s “Understanding ADHD”](#).

### **References:**

ADHD Centre (UK) on Manifestations of ADHD in Males and Females:  
<https://www.adhdcentre.co.uk/female-vs-male-adhd/#>

Attention Deficit Disorder Association on ADHD: <https://add.org/untreated-adhd-in-adults/>

Center for Disease Control on ADHD: <https://www.cdc.gov/adhd/data/index.html>

CHADD on Symptoms of Manifestations of ADHD in Girls: <https://chadd.org/for-adults/symptoms-of-adhd-in-women-and-girls/>

Cleveland Clinic on ADHD Medication & Management:  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/11766-adhd-medication>

National Institute on Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd>

NPR on the Rise of ADHD Diagnoses: <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2024/05/23/1252941968/adhd-diagnoses-are-rising-1-in-9-u-s-kids-have-gotten-one-new-study-finds>