

Nebraska Strong  
By Sarah

As of March 29<sup>th</sup>, roughly 820,000 acres of land, homes, and livestock in Western and Central Nebraska have burned this month in the wildfires. One person, 86-year-old Rose White, died trying to evacuate her home in Arthur County. Alongside the tremendous loss our Nebraska neighbors are experiencing, is the toll on their mental health. Feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, grief, and exhaustion are overwhelming, affecting individuals, families, and entire communities. Whether you are directly impacted or supporting someone who is, prioritizing your mental health is an essential part of resilience and recovery. The American Psychological Association (APA) recommends the following as you navigate your well-being during crisis and natural disasters:

- **Give yourself time to adjust.** Anticipate that this will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced.
- **Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen to your concerns.** If those closest to you also have experienced or witnessed the wildfire, realize that they may not be able to be as supportive as usual.
- **Turn it off and take a break.** You may want to keep informed but try to limit the amount of news you take in whether it's from the internet, television, newspapers, or magazines. While getting the news informs you, being over exposed to the news can increase your stress.
- **Find out about local support groups that are available for those who have suffered as a result of the wildfires,** particularly those that are led by trained and experienced mental health professionals. These groups can be especially helpful for people with limited personal support systems.
- **Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress.** Eat well-balanced meals, get some exercise and try to rest. Avoid alcohol and other drugs because they can suppress your feelings rather than help you to manage or lessen your distress. They can also intensify your emotional or physical pain.
- **Establish or reestablish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program.** Schedule some breaks to distract yourself from thinking about the fire and focus instead on something you enjoy. Try to do something that will lift your spirits.
- **Avoid major life decisions such as switching jobs, making large purchases, or making sudden changes in your relationships.** These activities have their own stresses that can exacerbate your current circumstances.

Anxiety and fear stemming from disasters can be particularly troubling for children. Some may regress, showing younger behavior, and/or begin throwing tantrums, withdrawing, or secluding themselves. Some kids are more prone to nightmares resulting in a growing fear of sleeping alone. The APA provides the following guidance to caregivers as they work to provide comfort amongst uncertainty.

- **Spend more time with children and let them be more dependent on you during the months following the fire.** Affection can be comforting to children who have experienced trauma.

- **Provide play experiences to help relieve tension.** Younger children may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through activities such as drawing or pretend play.
- **Encourage older children to speak with you, and with one another, about their thoughts and feelings.** This helps reduce their confusion and anxiety about the disaster. Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.
- **Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing, and going to bed.** Help restore a sense of security and consistency.
- **Reduce the number of times children see the trauma on the news.** Repeatedly watching broadcasts of the disaster can retraumatize children.

Nebraska officials say people who want to support wildfire relief can contribute through the following organizations:

- [Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association](#) -Donations will help provide support to Nebraska’s volunteer firefighters for equipment, resources and recovery efforts.
- [United Way of Western Nebraska](#) - They have a relief fund set up and 100% of donations are going to meet needs caused by the fires.
- [Nebraska Sandhills Rancher Fire Relief Fund](#) - This fund will go to people primarily in the counties of Garden, Morrill, Arthur, Keith and Grant to assist in disaster recovery. A local grants committee will accept grant assistance applications and determine awards based on need.
- [Nebraska Cattlemen Disaster Relief Fund](#) — The Nebraska Cattlemen Disaster Relief Fund announced on Monday that they are accepting monetary donations and relief applications to assist beef cattle producers who are being impacted by fires.
- [American Red Cross Nebraska Region](#) — To support Red Cross Disaster Relief, visit [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org), call 1-800-RED CROSS (800-733-2767), or text REDCROSS to 90999. Donations help supply food, shelter, relief items, financial assistance, emotional support and other critical aid.
- [The Salvation Army Western Nebraska Wildfire Relief](#) — Donations will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$25,000 thanks to a Mutual of Omaha Foundation challenge gift— doubling the impact of each contribution. Funds support immediate needs like feeding firefighters and longer-term assistance for families impacted by the Cottonwood, Morrill, Road 203, and Anderson Bridge fires.

Resources:

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Wildfires*. <https://www.apa.org/topics/disasters-response/wildfires>

10/11 NOW News. (2026, March 27). *Cottonwood fire reaches full containment as Nebraska wildfire response shifts*. <https://www.1011now.com/2026/03/27/cottonwood-fire-reaches-full-containment-nebraska-wildfire-response-shifts/>

## Child Abuse Prevention Month: Reviewing Trauma and Substance Use.

By Nick

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. The goal of which is to increase awareness of child abuse and to encourage building community in efforts to protect children. Roughly 2 million children nationally receive prevention services. With such a large population, it is important to stay informed about trauma, how it develops, and how it can easily lead to other complications like substance use.

Trauma works by making those who suffer feel constantly in harm's way. Due to one or more traumatizing past events, your brain keeps itself on high alert, often triggering stress or a panic response. We refer to this as our fight or flight response. This dysregulated stress response is your brain being trained to keep you safe. It is letting your stress center, the amygdala, take the steering wheel instead of the more logical front of your brain. Due to the fight or flight response being overly active, those who have suffered through trauma often experience deep anxiety, hypervigilance, or emotional numbness.

Trauma doesn't just appear but often stems from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Recognized ACEs include: any form of abuse, neglect, substance misuse, divorced parents, poverty, incarcerated family members, etc. Just one of these events happening in the life of a child can drastically increase the chance that they develop a trauma disorder. Having more than one ACE can increase the odds of a trauma disorder even more.

ACEs are commonly discussed alongside trauma and are a widely understood concept within occupations working with children. On the opposite end of ACEs lives a less discussed concept called positive childhood experiences, or PCEs. This is where anyone can make the biggest difference in counteracting the negative effects of ACEs. PCEs are more than just any happy memory, but specifically aspects that bring a sense of belonging and stability to a child's life. This doesn't have to be at home with supportive parents but it can be at school when at least two adults take an interest in the child and give them a sense of belonging in the classroom, or being a part of a supportive friend group or club. Due to the large amount of time spent there, school has been recognized as one of the best places to introduce structure and care to children outside of the home. Teachers, social workers, coaches, and counselors are most often those who find themselves in the role of non-parent adults taking an interest. This doesn't mean you need to be a surrogate parent but ensuring that you are accepting and interested in what the youth has to say. This can make a large difference in their lives by reducing the effects of trauma and increasing resilience to it in the future. Trauma is a complex issue with many moving parts, so it is important to understand that PCEs can only do so much. Giving a student, a friend, or a neighbor a sense of belonging and stability will certainly help, but it cannot erase preexisting trauma.

Further complicating the issue of trauma is its strong ties to substance use. When looking at those who have been diagnosed with a trauma disorder, studies have shown an increase of up

to 75%, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, for their likelihood of trying illicit substances and up to three times more likely to become addicted in adulthood when identified with 4 or more ACEs. The extra temptation often arises to self-medicate. Most commonly, when someone whose trauma manifests with overactive stress responses, they will trend towards depressants like alcohol, opioids, or THC, while those who struggle with emotional numbness trend towards stimulants. Temporary fixes like substances may be tempting, but it is important to understand that addiction is even more dangerous to those who are struggling with a trauma disorder. Using substances while struggling with a trauma disorder has been shown to exacerbate the dangers of both, increasing the severity of already present anxiety, impulse control, aggression, or depression. On top of feeling emotionally worse, those who are using substances have an increased risk of nonlethal overdose due to self-medication.

Addiction has also been found to be both more common and harder to overcome in those struggling with a trauma disorder extending to substance use before a traumatizing event. Those who were misusing substances before a traumatizing event were shown to be far more likely to increase or continue use. In the case of the most common self-medicated substance of misuse, marijuana, 44.8% of individuals self-described themselves as dependent and planning to continue. This dependency is also extremely high with alcohol at 39% of individuals with dependency and 34.1% of those who were self-medicated with cocaine.

For more information on the effects of childhood trauma and how to support youth who have experienced trauma, visit The National Child Traumatic Stress Network at <https://www.nctsn.org/audiences/youth>.

#### Resources

<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trauma-and-stress#treatments>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-addiction/202109/why-trauma-can-lead-to-addiction>

<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trauma-and-stress>

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventionmonth/about-national-child-abuse-prevention-month/>

<https://www.apaf.org/our-programs/justice/free-resources/what-are-pce-s/>

Nebraska's Child Advocacy Centers: CAPstone, BraveBe, Project Harmony, Bridge of Hope, First Light CAC, Family Advocacy Network, and Faith Regional.

Nebraska's Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline 1-800-652-1999

## Landmark Cases in New Mexico and California Hold Big Tech Accountable for Harm to Youth By Tessah

Two landmark court cases in New Mexico and California have concluded and are the first to hold Big Tech companies legally responsible for harming young populations.

On March 24, the New Mexico State District Court found that social media conglomerate Meta failed to enforce minimum user age requirements and enabled harm, including child sexual exploitation, on its platforms: Instagram, Facebook, Messenger, and WhatsApp. This ruling came from the first phase of the trial; a second phase is expected, and the New Mexico Attorney General's Office plans to ask the court to order Meta to make significant changes to its platform to better protect users and to enact effective age verification. Currently, the minimum age is 13, but leading researchers urge families to delay the onset of social media use until a child is emotionally mature.

The following day, March 25, in the Los Angeles County Superior Court, a jury found that Meta and Google (YouTube) intentionally built their platforms to be addictive and harmful to youth mental health. Referring to social media features like algorithms, notifications, and filters as mechanisms designed to keep the user on the site longer. It should be noted that TikTok and Snap Inc. reached settlements before the trial, but those platforms use similar features.

In this courtroom, written documentation from Meta's internal team was presented to the jury as evidence of the company's knowledge of underage users and the addictive nature of their platforms. One communication read "If we wanna win big with teens, we must bring them in as tweens". (The tween years are between 9 and 12.) (Again, the legal age is 13.) A second document shared among Meta's internal team described that "11-year-olds were four times as likely to keep coming back to Instagram, compared with competing apps." (And again, the legal is 13.)

These cases show that tech companies are prioritizing profit over people. It's up to parents and our communities to prioritize our students' well-being over corporate benefit.

New Mexico and California are not the only states filing lawsuits against Big Tech. It's estimated that thousands of other lawsuits have been filed against Big Tech companies across the country. These filings have been made by other states' attorney general offices (both independently and jointly), parents, and school districts.

Within Nebraska, in May of 2025, Governor Jim Pillen signed legislation that protects youth on online platforms and keeps youth off their phones during the school day. Specifically, LB104 restricts phones from being used inside the classroom. LB383 requires parental consent for social media accounts and requires social media companies to verify the age of their users. And LB172 updated the definition of child pornography to include AI-generated content.

Furthermore, in recent years, Nebraska's Attorney General's office has filed lawsuits against Meta, TikTok, and, most recently, Roblox in both federal and state courts. Attorney General Mike Hilgers also joined a coalition of state attorneys general that issued a letter to all

AI industry leaders expressing concerns about harmful and dangerous material that is produced by AI tools and chatbots and distributed to youth.

At SCIP, we do not believe all social media usage is “bad”. When used appropriately, social media can provide greater connection with individuals geographically further away, foster digital creativity and self-expression, provide opportunities for networking, promote small businesses, and can help raise awareness, amongst other things.

And for those reasons, we encourage all parents and teachers to have conversations with their students about their social media usage. Ask your student (and maybe yourself), why do they want to use social media? Is social media fulfilling, and in what way? How do they use social media? How does social media make them feel? When do they use social media? We recognize these conversations might be difficult, so we’ve shared some resources below, and all of these are linked in the PDF copy and on SCIP's website:

- [American Academy of Pediatrics: Conversation Starters for Families About Media](#)
- [Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health \(Organization of the AAP\)](#)
- [Children and Screens](#)
- [Common Sense Media](#)
- [Connect Safety](#)
- [Know2protect- An official website of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#)
- [Social Media and Drugs: What Parents Need To Know. An article published by the Organization for Social Media Safety describes how social media is used to buy and sell street drugs](#)

Article citations: all information was obtained from the following sources.

- New Mexico case information: <https://nm DOJ.gov/press-release/new-mexico-department-of-justice-wins-landmark-verdict-against-meta/>
- New Mexico case information: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/jury-finds-metas-platforms-are-harmful-to-children-in-1st-wave-of-social-media-addiction-lawsuits>
- California case information: <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/25/nx-s1-5746125/meta-youtube-social-media-trial-verdict>
- California case information: <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/28/tech/social-media-verdict-advocates-hope-for-changes>
- Gov. Pillen signed legislation: <https://governor.nebraska.gov/gov-pillen-signs-legislation-protecting-kids-big-tech>
- AG Hilger TikTok: <https://ago.nebraska.gov/news/attorney-general-hilgers-files-landmark-lawsuit-against-tiktok-nebraska-state-court>
- AG Hilger Meta <https://ago.nebraska.gov/news/bipartisan-coalition-attorneys-general-file-lawsuits-against-meta-harming-youth-mental-health>
- AG Hilger Roblox <https://www.wowt.com/2026/03/04/nebraska-ag-announces-states-lawsuit-against-online-gaming-platform-roblox/>