Eating Disorders

Everyone needs to eat to survive. Some people, though, overeat or don't eat enough or at all, leading to an eating disorder. There are many underlying causes of eating disorders. Even though we associate eating disorders with adolescents, some children, as young as 5 years old, suffer from these types of behaviors. It isn't always apparent that a student is suffering from an eating disorder because they may "look healthy." Other times, parents or others rationalize the behaviors they are seeing, saying they will "grow out of it", "it's just a phase", or "they are just a picky eater". Others will try to force the student eat which can cause more conflict. As a result, parents and school professionals often struggle to know what to do.

The first challenge is noticing or identifying that a student may be struggling with an eating disorder. It's important to pay attention to warning signs and trust your gut. Some warning signs include changes in behavior around food, physical changes in appearance, what they are focusing on in social media, and the students' comments and beliefs about food or body image.

Once we have identified there is a problem, we need to listen openly to the student. The student needs to feel like they can share their issues with you and that you will not judge them. Your role should be that of a caring adult. By listening, you may find out the cause of the behaviors. Validate their feelings but don't offer solutions immediately. Remember, this is a process.

There are many different types of eating disorders, i.e., anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder, to name a few. Take time to research which disorder the student may be struggling with. Each disorder has different causes as well as different treatment approaches.

Next, seek support from outside sources. An eating disorder is a mental health condition and the student likely needs support in the form of a doctor and/or counselor. A doctor can explain long lasting complications from the eating disorder and help find the best and most healthy solution to reintegrating healthy eating habits. A counselor can help address the mental health struggles the student is experiencing and find appropriate ways to address the stressors with which the student is struggling.

Many students will deny having an eating disorder for a variety of reasons. So, what do you do? First, relay observations you have made of the students' behavior when talking with the student. Some students may deny the problem because they do not think or realize they have a problem. Having evidence to support your concerns may help them see they do have a problem and need help. You should also express concerns you have about the students' health and safety. This can lead into a discussion about seeing a doctor and counselor. Even if the student does not believe they have a problem, suggest that they visit with a doctor or a counselor, even if it is just to be sure they are doing okay. If the conversation is spinning in circles and you or the student are becoming upset, it is time to end the conversation and return to it later when you are both calmer. Make sure the student knows that your door is always open if they want to talk. Depending on your responsibilities, you should also take any necessary actions. For school personnel, this may include informing and discussing the issue with parents.

Eating disorders in youth are a very serious concern, and can start in youth as young as five years old. These disorders not only stem from mental health issues but can also cause long-term negative effects and disrupt their development. Addressing these issues as soon as possible is our best way to help the student not suffer negative effects. Never ignore or minimize the problem by saying they "just need to eat". Do not worry that you are "overreacting" because if you have a concern, more than likely you are right. It is better to react to a suspicion and then have it end up not being a concern rather than not doing anything. Taking that first step and trusting your instincts can help the student get the support they need to live a long, healthy life.

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Secure Your Mask First: Self-Care Isn't Selfish

In October of 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health, citing the serious toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on top of existing challenges. The US Surgeon General echoed these concerns in December by issuing a public health advisory to provide recommendations for how to address the mental health challenges confronting children and adolescents. At the same time, national surveys have highlighted a major increase in the number of U.S. adults who report symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia and burnout. How do we support kids' mental health when the adults that provide care and support are struggling too?

Mental health is more than the absence of a mental illness, it is essential to our overall health and quality of life. Self-care plays a large role in maintaining mental health. When life becomes overwhelming, self-care may be ignored. Now, more than ever, parents, caregivers, educators and other youth-serving advocates need to be given the space to invest in their own wellness. Unfortunately, for many, just the idea of "self-care" can feel stressful. In a world where many feel like they are burning the candle at both ends, lack of time and energy are two of the most common reasons individuals cite for not making self-care a priority.   Experts recommend reframing the context of self-care. Rather than thinking of self-care as an indulgence, consider it a necessity (like air, food and water). Self-care is more than just pampering yourself; it's about protecting your mental health and fostering sustainability. Self-care techniques and general lifestyle changes can improve general wellbeing, help to reduce stress and can help manage symptoms of mental health problems. Additionally, self-care can help build resilience towards stressors that cannot be eliminated.

Self-care looks different for everyone, and it is important to find what you need. Because self-care is about being in tune with what your body and mind need to function optimally, it requires increased self-awareness. It may take trial and error to find what works best for you. Keep in mind that self-care doesn't have to follow the mantra of "go big or go home". Even small steps can go a long way. For example, 10 minutes of daily meditation or mindfulness can bring benefits. When it comes to self-care, something is better than nothing.

Not sure how to get started? Consider the following 5 key elements to self-care for a few ideas:

Physical:
- Protect your sleep- one of the most important interventions in mental upkeep
- Eat wisely- eating habits play a large role in mood regulation throughout the day
- Get outside- sunshine helps brighten mood
- Exercise- our bodies release dopamine and endorphins when we exercise that can help boost mood

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Emotional:
- Stress management
- Coping skills
- Practice kindness- helping others can make us feel good
- Go for gratitude- research shows that regularly expressing gratitude helps boost overall happiness, leading to lower rates of stress and depression
- Practice forgiveness- people who forgive have better mental health and report being more satisfied with their life.

Psychological:
- Monitor your inner dialogue- explore how to better manage negative self-talk/thoughts
- Self-Reflection
- Engage in a digital detox
- Practice mindful news consumption
- Listen to a thought-provoking podcast
- Fuel your mind by learning a new skill, reading a book or doing a puzzle (anything that helps you learn, think and grow).

Social:
- Nurture support systems- spend time interacting with friends and others; maintain communication
- Give thought to which relationships are no longer serving in your life- relationships should uplift and fulfill you, not deflate and drain you
- Get involved in your community
- Set boundaries- it is okay to say no
- Talk it out- find someone you trust to talk to if you are having a hard time
- Ask for help

Spiritual:
- Embrace some alone time (even if for just a short time)
- Practice mindfulness or meditation- there's an app for that, do a quick google search to discover mediation and mindful apps that can help get you started
- Journal
- Volunteer for a cause you care about
- Create a vision board or do something that lights you up and inspires you

On a final note, remember that just because a behavior is "good for you", doesn't make it self-care. To get the full benefit of self-care practices, you need to get some enjoyment or gratification out of the activity. Search for self-care practices that leave you feeling energized and fulfilled to help boost overall wellbeing.

References: American Psychological Association; Childmind Institute; Everyday Health Group; National Education Association; National Institute of Mental Health

A Dangerous Mix…Social Media,Teens & Drugs

Right or wrong, good or bad, it seems as though during the teen years, things like friend cliques, peer pressure and bullying have always been a part of growing up for each generation. And while these things still hold true for today's teens, they also find themselves navigating a completely new obstacle their parents and grandparents didn't have to navigate: social media.

We know there is an upside to social media apps as they allow all of us, as well as teens, to share and stay connected with friends and family. This is especially true when busy schedules and distance make staying in touch much more difficult.

Unfortunately, just as there are a lot of upsides to social media, there are also very real downsides to it as well. And because social media/the digital world were not part of today's parents' and grandparents' school experiences, many find themselves struggling at times to help their kids safely navigate through it.

For instance, most parents and grandparents learned about "stranger danger", what it looked like and what to do when approached by someone in person and were able to pass that onto their own kids. However, understanding and recognizing "stranger danger" in the digital world has become much more complex and, in many ways, even more dangerous.

Luckily, through time and education, we all have come to recognize some of the serious dangers of being online. Because of this, most kids now learn about stranger danger in the online world as well as in the "real world" both at home and school.

Beyond "stranger danger", we also have learned and seen studies that show for some, especially teens, social media is directly correlated to unhealthy emotional and mental

health. Kids, especially teens, constantly and continually compare themselves and their lives to others by what they see on social media sites. For most of us, the adolescent and teen years were indeed awkward years, as acne and hormonal and body changes made sure of that. Just like teens of today, we, too, would compare ourselves to our friends and other peers at school. However, just like "stranger danger," social media has really complicated and intensified an already complicated and intense time in a teen's life.

Some kids find themselves constantly looking at and checking posts on social media sites to make sure they didn't miss anything "important". They then find themselves comparing their family life, friendships, activities and self-image to others they see online, whether they know them or not. This can, and has led to, an increase of kids experiencing anxiety, feeling inadequate and/or lonely, isolated and even clinically depressed.

And just when we start to feel educated about social media dangers and feel somewhat comfortable about addressing a concerning topic related to it, another one rears its ugly head as it creeps out from the digital world.

These days, we find ourselves, once again, behind the curve, with yet another problematic online phenomenon: The buying and selling of drugs. This phenomenon often intertwines with the online stranger danger element and the growing concern about the mental well-being of kids.

While substance use and experimentation among teens is not a new happening, the easy access and availability of these substances online is quite eye opening and extremely concerning. Gone are the days where kids needed an older sibling or an older friend to help them access alcohol or other drugs. These days, kids buy and sell drugs online through social media sites and apps.

Quite literally at a push of a button and a click or two, kids have access to most any drug imaginable. The relative ease of ordering from headshops or self-described "pharmacies" online produces a false sense of security that what they are buying is safe.

While teens do order from headshops or self-described "pharmacies" online, they are even far more likely to buy and even sell from and to other kids on social media sites. Snapchat, Tik Tok, Instagram and You-Tube are four of the most popular social media sites and apps kids use, whereas, most adults tend to be on Facebook.

All of these apps, including Facebook, can unintentionally lead to the drug-world culture. However, one app appears to be utilized more often when it comes to buying and selling drugs for teens. That app is Snapchat.

Snapchat is the most popular apps kids use. Since Snapchat is set up to automatically disappear once it is viewed, this makes it easy to conceal/hide communications about buying and selling of drugs. And if a disappearing post wasn't enough, Snapchat also has an app function that allows someone to turn on their notification function so they know when and who took at screenshot of a post. Just knowing this function exists is a huge deterrent to teens taking a screen shot of drug related posts and reporting them.

However, even when parents use parental controls and monitor apps, they often overlook drug referenced posts. Kids, in general, use emojis and pictures or acronyms to communicate online and communicating about drugs is no different.

Below are two links on emojis and acronyms and what they mean within the drug world.

https://www.scribd.com/document/550088796/DEA-Emoji-Drug-Decoder

https://www.joe.co.uk › life › is-your-teen-texting-abou..

 Luckily, social media platforms like Snapchat are beginning to update and improve their proactive detection capabilities to remove, block, and/or reject posts related to drug dealings from its platform. They are also implementing new tools and educational resources in an effort to help address the devastating impact of drug overdose and the fentanyl crisis.

According to CBS News, Snapchat has stated they are "determined to do their part to eradicate drug sales." Instagram said it will "continue making improvements" to keep young people safe. And the latest quarterly Transparency Report shows Tik-Tok has removed around 96% of drug-related videos within 24 hours. All three companies said they are using technology to proactively remove this content.

The big question is, what can parents do? Simply talk with your kids about drugs. Have an open and honest conversation about the dangers of drugs. Secondly, make it a priority to know which apps your kids use and learn how to use them and what different emojis and acronyms represent.

For more information about teens and drug use and abuse, please contact or visit SCIP online at www.scipnebraska.com

https://www.nextgenerationvillage.com › drugs › related

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