

Below the Surface: Understanding Anger

Anger is a feeling that often has a negative connotation, but anger itself is something everyone experiences and is a normal, healthy emotion when expressed appropriately. While anger can produce significant physical and emotional discomfort, it is an appropriate response to being hurt, feeling frustrated or powerless. It is normal for youth to struggle with feelings of anger. It is important for adults to recognize that the feeling of anger isn't usually the problem. How a child or teenager responds to and expresses the emotion of anger is what can lead to problematic behaviors. When youth do not know how to cope with angry feelings, they may act out or attempt to deal with anger by discharging it onto other people or objects. It can be helpful to remember that the prefrontal cortex, which is the part of our brains involved in problem-solving and impulse control, isn't fully developed until the mid-to-late twenties. Thus, youth are biologically less equipped to manage overwhelming feelings like anger. They need adults to help them learn how to manage those strong emotions.

Behavior experts acknowledge that anger doesn't happen in a vacuum. It is often accompanied by other powerful emotions and, in fact, may be a secondary emotion to something deeper. Anger may mask fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, embarrassment, betrayal, hurt, jealousy or sadness. When a child acts their anger out in a destructive way, it may be helpful to help guide them to get in touch with what is driving their feelings of anger so they can learn to release it in healthier ways. Without the skills and tools to help manage emotion, anger can quickly turn into defiance, disrespect and aggression. According to research produced by the Child Mind Institute, the goal should not be to stop children and adolescents from feeling anger, but to help them find safer, less harmful and productive ways of expressing it. Below are a few strategies to help youth recognize anger and deal with it more constructively.

1. **Talk about feelings.** Help kids to explore why they are feeling angry. When we teach kids to label their feelings, they are more equipped to verbalize feelings of anger and what's behind those feelings. Help them to see that they're in control of their actions when they are feeling angry.
2. **Help youth identify their triggers (things that always make them angry) and their physical warning signs that they are becoming angry.** Adults can help youth develop strategies to help them stay in control of their emotions when they experience triggers. Recognizing when their body is beginning to react to anger can also signal that it is time to put an appropriate coping skill into action.
3. **Encourage coping skills.** Youth who lack coping skills are more likely to become verbally or physically aggressive. It's helpful for youth to have a variety of coping skills to fall back on. What works for one young person may not work for another and sometimes it takes some trial and error to find out what works best. Examples of coping skills include exercise, taking a time-out, relaxation techniques (like mindfulness and deep breathing), writing in a journal or drawing.

4. **Teach problem-solving skills.** Problem-solving can help identify the pros and cons of potential solutions before taking action. When kids understand that there are many possible solutions to a problem, they are more likely to spend a few minutes examining their options rather than resorting to aggressive or impulsive behavior.
5. **Differentiate between feelings and behavior.** Teach kids and teens the difference between angry feelings and aggressive behavior. Let them know that angry feelings are completely acceptable but aggressive behavior like throwing things, hitting, breaking objects, making threatening comments and verbal aggression can have serious consequences. Discuss with youth potential academic, social and legal consequences to aggressive and violent behavior.
6. **Establish clear expectations for behavior at home and at school.** Parents and other adults should role model appropriate behavior, establish clear rules, and set consequences for breaking those rules.
7. **Model appropriate anger management skills.** The best way to teach children how to deal with anger is by showing them how you deal with your emotions when you feel angry. If kids routinely see the adults in their life lose their tempers, they'll likely do the same. Conversely, if kids see adults cope with feelings in a more constructive way, they will pick up on that too.

It is normal for kids and teens to struggle to manage their anger at times. When anger problems persist or seem to be getting worse, despite adult guidance and skill-building strategies, it is important to seek professional help. It should be noted that anger issues in kids can also be the result of underlying conditions like ADHD, anxiety disorders, learning problems, depression, trauma, or sensory processing issues. Seeking help from a physician or mental health provider can help evaluate the need for further assessment and intervention.

References: American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, Child Mind Institute, Nemours KidsHealth, Verywell Mind

Youth Substance Use Data Trending Down

Substance use by adolescents and teens can have a big impact on their health and over all wellbeing. This is not some new revelation but it is certainly worth reiterating.

Some of the risks of substance use associated with adolescent/teen use:

- It can affect the growth and development of teens, especially brain development.
- It increases the likelihood of other risky behaviors, such as unprotected sex, dangerous driving and other reckless behaviors.
- It increases the likelihood of additional long-term health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and sleep disorders.

Furthermore, we also know the earlier adolescents and teens start using substances, the greater the likelihood of them developing substance abuse and addiction problems as adults.

What We Know: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco are the most commonly used substances by adolescents/teens.

According to the CDC, by the 12th grade:

- 66% of students have tried alcohol
- 50% of students have used marijuana
- 40% students have tried cigarettes

Some Good News: According to Monitoring the Future (Survey on Youth Substance Use), for the most part, the use of illicit substances among adolescents and teens has seen a slow but steady decline over the past decade. And it is certainly worth noting the sharpest and most significant decline in the past decade has occurred over the last year.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse's (NIDA) Monitoring The Future (MTF) survey, this is the most dramatic decline of drug use among youth from a one year comparison since the survey first began in 1975.

MTF Survey of Students Who Report [Illicit Substance](#) Use in past 12 Months.

<u>National %</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
<u>8th Grade</u>	14.7%	15.6%	10.2%
<u>10th Grade</u>	31.1%	30.4%	18.7%

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12 Grade 40% 36.8% 32%

Here is a more detailed look at some of the more prevalent/predominant substances teens use.

Alcohol: While marijuana, vaping and prescription medications garner a lot of media attention, deservedly so, alcohol is by far the most commonly used and abused substance among teens.

MTF Survey of Students Who Report Alcohol Use in past 12 Months.

<u>National %</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
<u>8th Grade</u>	20.5%	17.2%
<u>10th Grade</u>	40.7%	28.5%
<u>12 Grade</u>	55.3%	46.5%

It is important to note that Nebraska teens are almost 10% more likely to use alcohol than the average teen in the United States.

Marijuana: Marijuana continues to make the news as we see more and more states legalizing it for recreational use as well as for medical purposes. Regardless of the legality of it in a state, we know that marijuana, like most all other drugs, impacts brain development in youth.

It should be noted that teens in Nebraska are about 2% less likely to indulge in illicit drug use, including marijuana use, than the National average.

MTF Survey of Students Who Report Marijuana (all forms) Use in past 12 Months.

<u>National %</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
<u>8th Grade</u>	11.4%	7.1%
<u>10th Grade</u>	28.0%	17.3%
<u>12 Grade</u>	35.2%	30.5%

Vaping Nicotine: Even though vaping is on the decline among youth, it still remains to be the most prevalent way teens use nicotine.

MTF Survey of Students Who Report Vaping Nicotine in past 12 Months.

<u>National %</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
<u>8th Grade</u>	16.6%	12.1.1%
<u>10th Grade</u>	30.7%	19.5%
<u>12 Grade</u>	34.5%	26.6%

What to Keep an Eye On: One of the things we know, no matter if we are talking about youth or adults, is that mental health and substance use/abuse are highly correlated. This is important to note as all across the country, including Nebraska, we are seeing an increase in those needing and trying to access mental health services.

As we have learned, when mental health concerns go untreated, youth and adults alike often turn to substance use as a way to cope/treat their mental health. And while it is encouraging that youth substance use is trending downward, we must continue to be proactive and intentional in a preventive manner, such as addressing the growing mental health needs of youth.

For more in-depth data on youth substance use, please go to <https://nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/monitoring-future> or go to the SCIP website at www.SCIPnebraska.com.

<https://nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/monitoring-future>

<https://www.samhsa.gov> > find-help > disorders

<https://www.cdc.gov> > ncbddd > fasd > featu

Grief: What is It? What Should Be Expected?

During everyone's lifetime, they will experience some form of grief. Grief occurs following a loss, and loss can take many forms, such as a death, a divorce or breakup, or missing out on activities because of a pandemic. Many young people have experienced grief due to losses caused by the pandemic, such as cancellation of prom, sporting events, the inability to build relationships with or have contact with teachers and friends, as well as deaths caused by COVID-19. Each person experiences grief differently, ranging from physical reactions, frequent thoughts, strong emotions, and spiritual reactions. It is often difficult to know how to help someone who is grieving or mourning or how long the grieving process will last.

Mourning is the term used to describe the process of letting out your grief. Mourning is an important release for individuals who are grieving. If mourning is avoided and feelings are repressed, outbursts may occur and can cause mental anguish. For younger children, there are many ways they can let out those feelings and mourn. These include talking to an adult they trust, asking questions, sharing memories, crying, playing, allowing themselves to feel happy without guilt, shame or judgement, expressing themselves through art, talking to other children who are also grieving, and reading books.

Mourning for teens can be more difficult than at any other stage of life. Teens are already going through hormonal and social changes. Add in the complication of losing something or someone who is important to the teen and it can be overwhelming. It is important to remind teens they are not alone, that it's okay to share their feelings, and that the emotions they are feeling are normal and healthy. It can take time to overcome grief and they should be encouraged to share their story, talk about their experiences and cherish their memories. It is important to note that people grieve differently.

Many individuals feel guilty for "moving on" or being happy after experiencing a loss, especially when someone dies to whom they were close. When these thoughts occur, it's important to remind the individual that grief is not about forgetting someone existed or that they died, but rather about finding ways to remember their loved ones and learning to live life without them. We must also remind them that grief may come in "waves". Some days they may feel normal, while other days their grief may be very intense. This also includes having days of feeling numb or being in shock or disbelief.

Overall, people who are grieving and mourning are going to react and work through it differently. There is no cookie cutter way to handle grief with children, teens, or adults. What is important is to provide support for people who are grieving and to look for signs if they need further intervention, like counseling or seeing a doctor. More importantly, we must understand that grief and mourning is a natural and healthy

process that takes place in a person's life. Listen to and let the person express their grief in healthy ways. Do not judge or guilt them out of happy days. Lastly, allow them to feel their feelings and not bottle them up or isolate themselves from other loved ones who are trying to help.

For more information visit the sites below:

Mourning Hope-Grief Resources

<https://www.mourninghope.org/services/resources/>

TeensHealth-Death and Grief

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/someone-died.html>

Kids Health-Bereavement Reactions of Children and Young People By Age Group

<https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/bereavement-reactions-children-young-people-age-group>

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry-Grief and Children

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Grief-008.aspx

What's Your Grief? -Helping a Teenager Deal with Grief

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/helping-a-teenager-deal-with-grief-2/>