

## Understanding Youth Substance Use and Addiction

Together, parents, schools and the community play an important role in preventing drug and alcohol use amongst youth.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), alcohol, marijuana and tobacco are drugs most commonly abused by adolescents. Substance use by youth can have a huge impact on their health, development and overall wellbeing. Prevention and early intervention strategies can reduce the adverse effects that substance use disorders have on our communities. Prevention experts recommend talking early and often about the risks of substance use. The earlier we start talking to our youth about the risks of substance use, the more equipped they are to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to make good choices. Parents play a key role in preventing alcohol or drug use amongst youth. While there are several ways to help prevent the use of alcohol and drugs (fostering healthy and responsible attitudes, encouraging supportive relationships, fostering the development of positive interests and showing kids that their decisions matter), one of the best strategies parents can engage in is talking openly and honestly with their youth. Research shows that kids who have conversations with their parents and learn about the dangers of alcohol and drug use are 50% less likely to use alcohol and drugs than those who don't have such conversations (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.).



One of the greatest risks of experimenting with substances during adolescence is the risk of developing a substance use disorder. Addiction is a complex brain disease that in many cases originates in adolescence. According to the Center on Addiction:

- 9 out of 10 people who abuse or are addicted to nicotine, alcohol or other drugs began using these substances before they were 18.
- People who begin using addictive substances before age 15 are nearly 7 times likelier to develop a substance problem than those who delay first use until age 21 or older.
- Every year that substance use is delayed during the period of adolescent brain development, the risk of addiction and substance use decreases.

Adolescence is a time of critical brain development. The human brain does not fully develop until the early to mid-20's. One of the most important parts of the brain and the last to develop is the prefrontal cortex. This is the part of the brain that controls reasoning, impulses and decision making. Drugs and alcohol during this time of development can change the brain and "hijack" many of its important functions. While different drugs affect the brain differently, a common factor is that they all target the reward system of the brain by flooding it with dopamine. Dopamine is a chemical messenger that is naturally produced in the brain affecting emotions, movements, memory, motivation and the sensations of pleasure and pain. Dopamine not only tells us that something is pleasurable, but it motivates us to repeat that behavior. Addictive substances produce a much larger surge of dopamine resulting in a powerful connection between the use of the drug and the resulting pleasure or high. This creates a drive to repeat the behavior. Due to the immaturity of the adolescent brain, this connection becomes more strongly reinforced.

There are a number of reasons why youth might be influenced to experiment with various substances including peer pressure, to try to fit in, boredom or curiosity. Youth may also turn to using substances as a means of self-management or self-medication to deal with underlying issues. For example, youth may find 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. While most teens do not escalate from trying drugs or alcohol to developing a substance use disorder, experimenting can lead to other adverse effects and contribute to a pattern of risky behavior.

Knowing the warning signs of drug or alcohol use can aid parents, caregivers and other concerned adults in early intervention efforts. Often, behavioral changes are one of the first visible signs of substance use. These can include:

- Poor academic performance
- Missing school and/or extracurricular activities
- Getting into conflicts or trouble at school.
- Becoming defiant, uncooperative, or hostile (e.g., violating curfew, ignoring rules, lashing out)
- Change in friends or social groups
- Decreased interest in activities and hobbies
- Acting secretive
- Isolation from friends and family
- Unexplained disappearances for significant periods of time

In addition to these behavioral changes, changes in health and physical appearance, personality or mood may also be present. If you are concerned about a youth in your life, your local SCIP program can assist in connecting to appropriate supports. Family physicians can also serve as a great starting point to assess concerns. For additional resources and information visit:

<https://scipnebraska.com/resources/resources/substance.html>

References: Center on Addiction; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); Partnership for Drug Free Kids; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)



The School Community Intervention and Prevention (SCIP) mission is to provide an effective prevention and early intervention process to help students and their families address possible behavioral health concerns so that students may achieve and lead healthy, productive lives.

SCIP 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 student behavior.

Between the ages of 6 and 18, youth spend much of their time inside the school building. Besides parents and guardians, school personnel spend the most time with our community's youth. SCIP utilizes those connections 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.

SCIP teams within schools have committed and passionate school personnel who want to see students succeed inside and outside of school, just as parents want to see their student succeed inside and outside of school.

When a student is displaying concerning behaviors, the student can be referred to the SCIP Team within the student's school. And when appropriate, the SCIP Team may set up a parent/guardian meeting to share and express the concerns surrounding the student/student's behavior. Together, parents/guardians and school personnel explore options and seek possible solutions that may help improve the student's ability to be more successful in and out of school. When appropriate, the SCIP Team may offer or

suggest some additional school resources to the student and their family. Below are a few examples of some in-school services schools may offer:

- SAT/504/SPED
- Skills and Support Groups
- Mentoring Programs (Teammates/Big Brother/Sister etc.)
- One on One meeting time with a particular school personnel (guidance counselor, school psychologist, mentor, teacher etc.)
- Therapeutic services offered within schools

In addition to connecting families and students to school-based resources and services, the SCIP team also helps navigate and connect a student/family to resources and agencies within/near their communities.

SCIP collaborates with community behavioral health agencies that will provide screenings at no cost for the student/family. SCIP currently collaborates with around 30 behavioral health agencies throughout Nebraska.

SCIP serves all school levels (pre-k-12) and currently serves 131 schools throughout Nebraska.

To find out more information about SCIP and/or to see if SCIP is in your child's school, please visit our website at [www.scipnebraska.com](http://www.scipnebraska.com). Or for more information on how your school can become a SCIP school, please contact the SCIP office at (402) 327-6843.



# Community Awareness Series: Promoting Healthy Behaviors

Our youth are our future's greatest asset. Schools, parents, caregivers and communities all play a role in providing supportive pathways for our youth as they navigate childhood and adolescence. SCIP (School Community Intervention and Prevention) is partnering with Lincoln Public Schools, Bryan Independence Center and the Lancaster Prevention Leadership Team to put on a series of valuable presentations about how to support the health and well-being of our community's youth. These events are open to parents, students, school professionals and community members. Please join us for our first event on:

**October 24, 2019- Let's Talk: Youth Vaping & Marijuana Use**

**Lincoln Southeast High School (Commons Area)**

**2930 S. 37<sup>th</sup> Street**

**Lincoln, NE 68508**

**6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.**

Presentation:

Research shows that families and influential adults play the most important role in preventing youth substance use. As part of National Health Education Week, this presentation will provide education and awareness surrounding two growing youth substance use issues as a means to promote conversations and healthy decision making. Marijuana continues to be one of the most prevalent substances of abuse among our youth and teen vaping is increasing at alarming rates.

Rebekah Willoughby, a Public Health Educator with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, and Deputy Jeremy Schwarz, a Licensed Drug Recognition Expert with the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office, will discuss:

- The prevalence of youth vaping and marijuana use
- The effects of these substances on the developing youth brain
- Physical health effects of vaping and marijuana use
- The role of marketing in vaping and various products that youth are using
- Legal aspects
- Signs of use
- How to engage in conversations with youth about vaping and marijuana
- Resources to further address prevention and early intervention of use.

Please contact Abbe Edgecombe, SCIP Coordinator for Lincoln-Lancaster County, for questions or additional information: (402) 327-6841 or [aedgecombe@lmep.com](mailto:aedgecombe@lmep.com)



School Community Intervention and Prevention

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