

## **COVID-19 and Effects on Caregivers and Students**

The coronavirus pandemic has impacted everyone's life since the beginning of the outbreak in the United States in early 2020. Many people did not realize that one year later we would still be dealing with issues related to COVID-19. These issues include not only physical and mental health, substance use, and the general lack of resources for mental health but also having adequate financial resources to get basic necessities.

The National Federation of Families conducted a survey in 2021 to see how families and educators are doing since COVID-19 began. In this survey, they also gathered quotes from caregivers who completed the survey. One caregiver from Illinois said, "I have no concerns with the school or his teachers - everyone is trying their best in very uncertain times, but I feel that this year is going to be a wash for both my son and daughter. I dread next school year when everyone is going to be playing catch-up."

There were 1,100 families included in the survey, representing over 2,300 children throughout the United States of America. The survey respondents included 10% from the pre-K age group, 32% from elementary school, 23% from middle school, 27% from high school, and 8% from post high school levels. These students were then separated by virtual learners (55%), in person learners (13%) and hybrid learners (32%). 49% of caregivers responded that they felt their students were doing worse than they expected.

The survey also asked what caregivers found to be the most challenging aspect of learning during the COVID-19 outbreak. The number one challenge identified was balancing school and work— or in other words, time management. Other issues that made up the top four were meeting special education needs, navigating internet platforms, and support from schools and teachers. One parent from New York stated, "I believe most teachers and administrators are doing the best they can with what they have been given. I know they are trying to maintain quality education while dealing with both remote and in-person learning, along with the stress of putting themselves at risk of exposure. My high school-aged child has struggled immensely, to the point where we have had to pull her out of school. We were looking at in-patient programs, but were lucky to get her into a partial hospitalization program. She is still struggling and I am very concerned about her transition back to school. The anxiety and pressure these children are feeling is immense and this generation will most likely have long term mental health struggles for years to come."

Social distancing has also had a profound effect on caregivers and their children's mental health. Caregivers said both they and their children are experiencing an increase in behavioral health symptoms such as anxiety, depression, substance use, and negative thoughts. Caregivers also reported that they are accessing more mental health services and support for themselves than their children. The National Federation of Families suggests that this may be due to the limited number of mental health professionals that serve youth. Additionally, service methods, such as telehealth, may be more difficult to navigate for children.

"Right now, the most helpful thing is the support, help, encouragement, and empathy that we are getting from our teachers. They have been wonderful." a parent from Illinois stated. The stress of the pandemic has affected everyone. Parents are doing their best. Teachers are doing their best. We all need to do our best to find ways to support our children by watching for warning signs of mental health struggles and seeking help, when needed.

## **Reference**

National Federation of Families-Education and Mental Health During COVID-19  
[https://49bf42da-b858-4965-a674-2901508f2c7d.usrfiles.com/ugd/49bf42\\_a87eda30feb2424cb0e46ee6e160bb0f.pdf](https://49bf42da-b858-4965-a674-2901508f2c7d.usrfiles.com/ugd/49bf42_a87eda30feb2424cb0e46ee6e160bb0f.pdf)

## **Resources**

COVID-19 Resources for Parents, Youth and Families  
<https://www.ffcmh.org/covid-19-resources-for-parents>

COVID-19 Parental Resource Kits  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/parental-resource-kit/adolescence.html>

Supporting Families During COVID-19  
<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>

World Health Organization  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting>

Mental Health America  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting>

## **Underage Drinking**

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), alcohol is the most commonly used substance of use among young people in America. Drinking when underage poses serious health and safety risks. Although it is illegal for people under 21 years of age to drink alcohol, people from 12-20 years of age consume about one-tenth of all alcohol consumed in the United States. Compared to adults, adolescents tend to consume higher quantities of alcohol per occasion. More than 90% of the alcohol consumed by young people is in the form of binge drinking (CDC).

Teens may try alcohol for a variety of reasons including peer pressure, to escape stress, to fit in socially or even boredom. Early initiation of drinking is associated with a number of adverse consequences, however, many teens experiment with alcohol without fully recognizing the risks associated with underage drinking. In particular, several studies have found that early-onset drinking is linked to the risk of greater substance abuse problems later in life. 95% of the 14 million people who are alcohol dependent began drinking before the legal age of 21 (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism). In addition, research also has shown that the teen age brain is more vulnerable to alcohol than the adult brain. Underage drinking can interfere with normal brain development and change the brain over time. During adolescence, the brain is growing and maturing more rapidly than other ages. Alcohol specifically affects areas of the

School Community Intervention and Prevention

May 2021

*SCIP is funded in part by: Lincoln Public Schools, United Way of Lincoln/Lancaster County, Region V Systems, Nebraska DHHS: Division of Behavioral Health and Region 4 Behavioral Health System*

brain responsible for information processing, learning and memory. While adults who drink can also experience problems, learning and memory are more compromised by alcohol in adolescents than in adults. Teens who drink are also more likely to experience problems in school, social problems, adverse mental health issues (including higher risk of suicide), abuse of other drugs and legal problems, compared to teens who abstain from alcohol until the legal age of 21.

Parents and other caring adults play a leading role in preventing underage drinking. In fact, 80% of teens say their parents are the biggest influence on their decision to drink (American Academy of Pediatrics). Prevention starts by engaging in conversations about alcohol use. Experts agree that it is important to talk early and often about underage drinking. Talking to children and teens about alcohol should not be a one-time event, but rather, an open, honest and ongoing conversation. Keeping lines of communication open with children and teens can build trust and help them feel more comfortable to ask questions and share concerns. Prevention experts recommend the below tips when talking with kids about alcohol.

- Stay informed about underage drinking as well as the risks associated with youth alcohol use.
- Rely on information from credible resources such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA or NIDA Teen), National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism or the Partnership to End Addiction.
- Talk honestly about the dangers of underage drinking and establish clear rules about not drinking while underage.
- Emphasize that drinking or buying alcohol before age 21 is illegal.
- Set expectations about what your child should do if offered alcohol (i.e. “If there is alcohol at a party, call me and I’ll pick you up”).
- Talk about choices and consequences to help them take responsibility for their decisions.
- Teach and encourage healthy coping skills to deal with issues like stress and peer pressure.

Still not sure how to start the conversation? The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Partnership to End Addiction, and Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) offer several helpful resources and free guides to help engage in conversations with youth about underage drinking.

SAMHSA: “Talk. They Hear You.” Substance Use Prevention Campaign Resources

<https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources>

MADD: “Power of Parents” Handbooks

<https://www.madd.org/the-solution/power-of-parents/#resources>

Partnership to End Addiction: “Alcohol- What Families Need to Know to Help Protect Young People”

[https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Alcohol-Guide\\_Families\\_030821.pdf](https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Alcohol-Guide_Families_030821.pdf)

References: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Partnership to End Addiction, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

## SUMMER TIME, SUMMER TIME, SUM-SUM, SUMMER TIME!!!!

Summer is right around the corner! Kids have always looked forward to summer because of the welcome break from school, homework and tests. And now that we have turned the corner from the pandemic and we are on our way to some good ole' fashion "normalcy", this summer might be one of the most highly anticipated summers in recent times, for all ages.

Yet, ideas for activities that are affordable and engaging for kids and their families can be difficult. That's why we've compiled a list of fun and free or inexpensive summer activities that families and neighbors can enjoy together.

- **Day...or Night at a Museum:** Research and find free museums in your area. City museums and parks often are free or have free days. There are literally hundreds of museums throughout Nebraska!



- **Explore & Discover the "Wilderness":** Camping anyone?!? Camp outside in your own backyard or make a tent inside! Camping can be fun and you can learn about nature and develop some "mad" outdoor camping skills, such as setting up a tent, roasting marshmallows and making smores, as well as how to use a compass, and how to recognize and identify what plants are safe and which are poisonous.



- **Fishing Anyone?** Nebraska Game and Parks has a variety of fishing programs aimed at recruiting kids to the sport of fishing. Some of their events include youth fishing tournaments as well as community fishing events, where rods, reels and expert instruction are all available to young and new anglers at no cost.



- **Hoses, Sprinklers, Slippery Slides, Oh My:** Hook up a sprinkler, get out the hose and/or fill up a plastic pool and “let the water games begin” for a fun day in the sun. Rinse and repeat for next week!



- **Picnic it Up:** Make a day out of eating outside at a local park, neighborhood grassy area or even your backyard. Instead of eating lunch inside, take to the outdoors to a picnic table or just throw a blanket down and ENJOY!



- **Get CREATIVE:** Have an arts & crafts day once a week. Let your kids pick an art activity to do inside or outside. Don't forget to display the artwork. Remember, art is in the eye of the beholder! Behold and be proud!



- **Good Ole' Exercise:** Host a backyard volleyball tournament, shoot some hoops or host a neighborhood pick-up game, ride bikes, jump rope, go for a walk, or play catch. Staying fit and active with family and friends makes for a more active and fun summer!



- **Game Night:** Find board games you have around the house and hold a family game night. Go a step further and host a neighborhood board game night.



- **“Worst Chef” or “Top Chef”:** There is only one way to find out! Let your kids try their hand at cooking dinner or baking dessert, with adult supervision, of course. Make it a real challenge by giving them a budget and taking them shopping for the needed items.



- **Outside Movie Night:** Many communities now have outdoor summer movie nights. You can check your local area to see if your community will be hosting one. Or, with a little online research and effort, you can create and hold your own outdoor viewing party right in your own backyard! So breakout those lawn chairs and blankets, grab some popcorn and drinks and sit back and enjoy the show!



- **Scavenger/Treasure Hunt:** Plan and have a scavenger/treasure hunt. Make lists of items to locate for a scavenger hunt or make a map and have a treasure hunt. You can hold the ultimate scavenger/treasure hunt with your own mini-version of the “Amazing Race”!





- **Volunteer:** There are lots of organizations and programs that welcome the help. Find out what is available in your area and let kids volunteer doing something that interests them. Kids who volunteer not only feel a sense of accomplishment and importance, they also tend to pick up some good skills and work ethic along the way.



The important thing to recognize and remember is that any and all of these activities do more than keep kids entertained during the summer...they often create memories that last a lifetime, especially following such an unprecedented summer last year!

Have a Happy, Safe Summer!