

Self-Care

“Where do you see yourself in five years?” This is a question most of us have been asked at some point in our lives. Five years ago, when people were asked that question, no one would have said, “I’ll be in the middle of a pandemic, having to wear face masks everywhere I go, and practicing social distancing.” The year 2020 is an unprecedented year. Everything about it has been unpredictable. There is one thing that everyone needs to make a priority, despite the pandemic or other crises that might be happening in 2020. That one thing is Self-Care. Self-care is vital in keeping people in the best shape possible, both mentally and physically.

What is self-care? Why is it so important? *Psychology Today* describes self-care as “... a continuous process of proactively considering and tending to your needs and maintaining your wellness.” In other words, self-care is what individuals do to keep a sound mind and body. It is important that a person take care of themselves if they want or need to help or take care of others. Self-care helps in many areas of a person’s life, including parenthood, family, relationships, work, and school. It also helps with any of the many ways we identify ourselves. If we do not take care of ourselves, it can lead to anxiety, anger, fatigue, and depression, and can contribute to reduced self-esteem, compassion, and empathy.



Some physical ways stress can affect you is a simple as:

- Headaches
- Low energy
- Upset stomach
- Aches, pains, and tense muscles
- Insomnia

While these are the general ways stress can affect people, this does not mean that stress will affect you the same way as others. You may have different symptoms related to stress. It is important for you to know when you are feeling stressed and what steps you need to take to take care of yourself. You should then try to identify what situations are causing you stress so that you can avoid them, if possible, or find ways to cope with the situation or activity.

There are many different ways to do self-care. Some people enjoy more artistic endeavors, such as writing in a journal, making music, writing a book, drawing, painting or pottery. Others prefer physical alternatives -- which is most likely some form of working out or eating healthy. Others need social outlets such as hanging out with friends or going on vacations or adventures with people. While there are many different ways engage in self-care, some people need help developing these skills by going to a counselor or seeking help with learning these skills from others.

Below are some things you should try to incorporate into your everyday self-care routine.

- Physical Health
 - Exercise routinely
 - Eating Healthy
 - Getting Enough Sleep
 - Avoiding Alcohol and Drugs
 - Practicing Relaxation Exercises
- Recharge yourself
- Practice Good Mental Health Habits
 - Notice the Positive
 - Gather Strength from Others

References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/modern-mentality/201901/is-self-care-just-trend>

<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Family-Members-and-Caregivers/Taking-Care-of-Yourself>

COVID-19 Substance Use/Abuse, Teens & Health

The current vaping epidemic among teens and college-aged individuals hit us fast and hard. However, through awareness and education, parents, schools and communities have begun to curb the epidemic. Yet, maybe now even more than before, the use of vaping pens and e-cigarettes among teens and college-aged individuals remains a very serious concern.

A Stanford study conducted in May of 2020 that was recently published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that teens and college-aged individuals, between the ages of 13 and 24, who had been tested for COVID-19 in May of 2020, and also vaped, were five times more likely to test positive for COVID-19 than those their age who did not vape.

The study further revealed that within that same age group, those who vaped and smoked cigarettes were seven times more likely to test positive for COVID-19 than those who did not vape or smoke cigarettes.

The study also indicates that teens and college-aged individuals who vaped were more likely to have respiratory symptoms, such as coughing and breathing issues, that are associated with COVID-19.

Dr. Halpern-Felsher, who was involved in the research study, said, "If you are a vaper, you are putting yourself at risk for COVID-19 and other lung disease."

And while the data for long term effects of COVID-19 remains largely unknown for adults and youth alike, we do know that some people who had COVID-19 and are now virus free continue to have mild to very serious health concerns related to the virus.

Unfortunately, the connection between COVID-19 and substance related concerns for youth does not start or end with vaping.

Months of social distancing and, in some cases, home isolation because of COVID-19, can be especially hard on anyone, maybe even more so on teens.

We know one of the top reported reasons teens experiment and/or use drugs is out of boredom. It is simply something to do to fill their time and satisfy their curiosity.

And with all of the cancellations surrounding school activities as well as summer athletics and the health mandates that closed malls, movie theaters, swimming pools, concert halls, etc., teens may have very well felt a level boredom they never had experienced before. As a result, parents and schools should remain on high alert for

teens needing additional supports in addressing substance use and abuse more so now than even before as we slowly move our way back to normalcy.

Additionally, we also know that many mental health disorders and illnesses begin to develop or emerge during the teen years. We further know, through a multitude of studies and research, that mental health disorders and illnesses are highly intertwined and co-occur in teens.

The stress, worry and the unknown caused by the COVID-19 can wear the best of us down, but teens may have an especially tough time coping mentally and emotionally.

Teens spend the majority of their time in school with friends, participating in activities and socializing with one another. And when COVID-19 hit, almost every aspect of their life was adversely interrupted.

They lost out on more than just in person school instruction time. And the more social and connected to extracurricular activities a teen was, the heavier their loss.

And so, some teens might feel or have felt very lonely and isolated from their friends. They might feel or have felt very anxious about all of the unknowns that surrounded them last spring and that are still swirling around at the start of this fall school year. They may even feel hopeless or angry about all of the changes and losses they endured because of the pandemic.

All of these possible feelings and happenings should serve as a serious reminder to parents and school personnel that these teens may need even more emotional and mental health supports and services in the coming months.

For additional resources and information on teen substance use/abuse and mental health concerns, please visit www.scipnebraska.com.

drugfree.org › [why-do-teens-drink-and-use-drugs](#)

www.drugabuse.gov › [related-topics](#) › [covid-19-resour...](#)

www.samhsa.gov › [coronavirus](#)

med.stanford.edu › [news](#) › [all-news](#) › [2020/08](#) › [vapin...](#)

Suicide Prevention: Supporting Student Mental Health

Stress is a normal reaction to our current situation and change from what is “normal” combined with uncertainty for the future can wear on the minds and emotional health of both adults and youth. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, teens may have an especially difficult time coping emotionally. Additionally, surveys of students conducted by Common Sense Media and America’s Promise Alliance have found that the pandemic has been hard on teenage mental health. 2020 has been a year of uncertainty. Uncertainty can challenge one’s sense of security, become a cause of stress and adversely affect mental health when the ability to cope is overwhelmed. Some of our students are returning to school, while some are learning remotely and others are doing a combination of both. In each scenario, we should anticipate that some of our youth will thrive, while others will struggle to adapt. Students will return both in-person or remotely with a variety of experiences as a result of changes that occurred in their lives during the past several months. Fear of getting sick or a family member getting sick, grief over missed experiences, financial hardship, worry that normal won’t be the same as before COVID-19, loss of social connections, academic or behavioral regression and loss of security are examples of feelings, emotions and experiences that our students may carry with them.

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness month. Suicide is currently the 2nd leading cause of death among adolescents or youth ages 10-24 in the United States. According to the vice president of research for the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, it will be two years before we have data on the actual impact of COVID-19 on the nation’s suicide rate. We don’t know if the pandemic will cause suicide rates to increase, but we do know that increased stress, anxiety, fear and feelings of uncertainty can adversely affect one’s mental health and wellbeing and potentially lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair. A key risk factor for suicide in youth is a mental health condition, especially when undetected or untreated. 2 out of 3 teens with depression don’t get treatment (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention). Identification and early intervention play key roles in suicide prevention. But focusing solely on mental health conditions does not give us a full picture of the complexities of suicide risk. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide risk almost always starts with the underlying layers of multiple factors including biological predispositions to mental illness, psychological traits such as impulsivity, and past history such as abuse, death of a loved one or a previous suicide attempt. Current life issues and events, such as stressors at home, school and with peer relationships, may also play a role.

During a time where a sense of heightened stress is the norm, it is important to educate parents, teachers, and caregivers to recognize which responses are “normal” for kids to have during this everchanging time and which might require further intervention and professional attention. Hopelessness and despair are extremely internal experiences. What gets expressed externally can look different depending on each individual. This is the reason the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention recommends paying attention to even subtle behavioral changes. Concerning behavior might include:

- Patterns of emotional and social withdrawal.

- Changes in mood that are not usual for your child (such as an increased irritability)
- Changes in behavior such as stepping back from personal relationships.
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping habits
- Easily angered
- Thoughts about death or suicide or talking about it
- An increase in risky behavior or reckless behaviors such as using drugs or alcohol
- Problems with memory, thinking or concentration
- Feeling “empty”, worthless or hopeless
- Lack of interest in any of the activities that used to bring pleasure

Just as we take care of our physical health, our mental health also needs to be nurtured. It is normal to experience moments of mental unwellness, especially during a time of change and uncertainty. Experts recommend checking in with teenagers often to discuss how they are feeling and managing. Keep lines of communication open, express authentic care and concern and validate their feelings. Talking about mental health and wellness as a normal and re-occurring topic can help open the doors for meaningful and important conversations. If you are worried that a youth in your life is thinking about suicide, one of the best ways we can prevent a tragedy is to ask them directly. For example, you might say, “have you ever felt so bad that you have had thoughts of suicide?”. This communicates that you are open to speaking about suicide in a non-judgmental and supportive way. Let them talk freely and listen without judgement. Other follow-up questions you might ask to engage in the conversation are, “how do you hurt?” or “how can I help?”. Connecting to a family physician or mental health professional can assist with getting the right supports in place. If you believe a child/teen is in crisis, don’t leave them alone and take them to an emergency room or a mental health center for an evaluation immediately. It is better to overreact than underreact, if your instinct tells you that a youth might be in danger.

You don’t have to wait for a crisis to happen to begin cultivating a supportive and safe environment for youth. The following can help keep kids safe:

- Receiving effective mental health care when needed
- Fostering positive connections to family, peers, school, community and social institutions that promote resiliency
- Creating safe and supportive school and community environments (this includes creating a culture that promotes a safe place for youth to seek help for themselves or their friends)
- Providing education to youth on mental health conditions and suicide prevention
- Helping youth to cultivate problem-solving and coping skills
- Keeping open communication regarding mental health concerns
- Restrict access to lethal means (this includes keeping prescription medications locked up)

For additional information, seek guidance and resources from:

The Center for Parent and Teen Communication- <https://parentandteen.com/>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention- <https://afsp.org/>

Region V Prevention Coalition: Talk Heart 2 Heart- <https://talkheart2heart.org/>

Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-TALK (8255) <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

School Community Intervention and Prevention

September 2020

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

School Community Intervention and Prevention (SCIP)- <https://scipnebraska.com/>

References: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention; The Childmind Institute; Education Week; Suicide Prevention Lifeline; Suicide Prevention Resource Center.