

Staying Connected

Did you know that there is a “feel good” hormone called oxytocin? This hormone is responsible for positive thinking and maintaining an optimistic view on life. Oxytocin also helps with bonding and can generate feelings of compassion. This then leads to the expansion of trust for those individuals. So how do we release this hormone? The answer, human touch. This could be as simple as a pat on the back, a hug, or a handshake, to name a few.

Physical touch can also increase levels of dopamine and serotonin. These are neurotransmitters that help regulate your mood and help your body relieve stress and anxiety. Touch can also have a positive effect on your health. It can boost your immune system and lower blood pressure. A study found that women who receive more hugs from their partners have lower heart rates and blood pressure than those that do not receive these hugs.

Not having physical touch is one of the many things people are struggling with since the onset of COVID-19. Since the pandemic began, people have experienced a wide range of cognitive and physical symptoms, such as changes in appetite, sleep, gastrointestinal issues, low energy, worry and forgetfulness. In addition to those issues, people are experiencing more headaches, likely caused by an increase in screen time due to work life changes.

Studies show that isolation and loneliness can raise stress levels. With social distancing in place, people are unable to be as social as they may have been in the past, reducing the opportunities for physical touch. This, in turn, causes an increase in isolation and feelings of loneliness. Studies have also shown that expressing feelings of love and affection can actually lower stress levels. Surprisingly, purely expressing those feelings can have the same benefits as physical touch and socializing.

It is beneficial for your health to be able to stay social. With social distancing in place, many people are resorting to simpler ways of communicating with others. This includes talking to neighbors when outside, going on walks, or even visiting from their yards or front porches. People are also becoming more creative with technology, communicating through online applications such as Zoom, Tik-Tok, Facetime, and Google Duo. This provides a safe way to connect and talk to family and friends who do not live with you or that you are not able to see in person due to COVID-19. This is especially important for those who live alone without children, roommates, or partners, as they are at the most risk for negative effects of isolation and lack of physical touch. Staying socially connected is key in times like this.

There are other ways you can stay connected to others and with your emotions. Finding an outlet through which to express yourself, such as writing music, stories or poems or getting in touch with your artistic side can also be helpful. Becoming “pen pals” with someone you can’t see in person is a great way to connect and share what’s happening in your life. The possibilities are only limited by a person’s imagination.

Being “physically” distant does not mean that you have to be “socially” distant. There are many ways for people to stay connected and avoid feelings of isolation while also being safe for themselves and others. Reach out to people in different ways, especially to those who live alone. You’ll not only lift their spirits but yours as well.

References

<https://plushcare.com/blog/advantages-of-human-touch-hugs/>

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-importance-of-staying-connected-while-practicing-social-distancing/>

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/social-distancing-doesnt-have-to-keep-you-socially-distant/>

Here are some other resources on staying connected:

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/alone-together-why-its-physical-distancing-not-social-distancing/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-touching-your-partner-can-make-both-of-you-healthier>

Disposable E-Cigarettes: An Emerging Trend in Youth Tobacco Use

Policy and regulation are key factors in reducing youth tobacco use. As the numbers of youth vaping soared over the past few years, initiatives to reduce youth access to electronic cigarettes have been at the forefront of tobacco regulation. Following epidemic levels of youth use of e-cigarettes and the popularity of certain flavors of e-cigarette products that appeal to kids, the FDA enforced a policy banning the manufacturing, distribution and sale of flavored cartridge-based e-cigarettes other than tobacco or menthol. However, the policy which took effect last February only targeted reusable vaping devices, like JUUL, and the flavor restrictions did not include disposable vaping products like the Puff Bar, Blu Disposable or the POSH Vape. Tobacco prevention experts say this loophole in policy has already begun to impact youth. According to Rebekah Willoughby, Tobacco Public Health Educator with the Lancaster County Health Department, “While it is encouraging that 1.8 million fewer youth vaped in 2020 compared to 2019, it is worrisome that newer disposable e-cigarettes, like Puff Bar, threaten that progress. 2020 data shows disposable e-cigarette use has increased from 2.4% in 2019 to

26.5% today.”



Disposable e-cigarettes (pictured above) are designed to be used and thrown away once the e-liquid has run dry. They are portable, discreet and initially less expensive than a rechargeable electronic device. According to several pro-vaping resources, following the federal ban on flavored vape pods, disposable e-cigarettes have become increasingly popular. Disposable vapes come in a variety of brands and flavors. Most are made with nicotine salt e-juices that provide a stronger hit. Depending on the manufacturer, one disposable e-cigarette ranges from 200-500 puffs and can be purchased on average from \$6 to \$20. The Puff Bar, a more popular disposable e-cigarette brand, can contain about as much nicotine as two or three packs of cigarettes and can be purchased for around \$8. The market for disposable vapes is quickly growing and in addition to being sold in stores, they are likewise sold all over the internet. Despite the fact that Nebraska law now requires the legal minimum age for use or purchase of tobacco products (including e-cigarettes) to be 21 years of age, most online stores only require consumers to acknowledge that they are 21 by electronically entering a birthdate at checkout. As a test, SCIP recently purchased three different disposable e-cigarettes brands via the Vapor4Life online store. There was no verification of ID necessary to complete the purchase.

Despite ongoing sales of flavored disposable e-cigarettes, the FDA has begun efforts to enforce stricter policies for companies who manufacture the flavored products. Additional policies and regulations are necessary to create environmental change to reduce youth vaping. According to the CEO and President of the nonprofit public health organization, The Truth Initiative, “without stronger federal polices that are free of loopholes that allowed for flavored disposable sales to soar, the progress that has been made to reduce youth vaping and tobacco use will be reversed or slowed significantly.”

In addition to policy change, prevention education continues to be an important piece in reducing youth vaping and tobacco use. Please visit the below web resources to learn more on how you can help in youth prevention initiatives:

Surgeon General: Know the Risks of Youth Tobacco Use
<https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/knowtherisks.html>

The Truth Initiative: Why Vaping is an Important Issue
<https://truthinitiative.org/our-top-issues/vaping-issue>

Tobacco Free Lancaster County: Juuling, Vaping and E-Cigarettes
<https://tobaccofreelancastercounty.org/electronic-cigarettes/>

Partnership to End Addiction: How To Talk With Your Child About Vaping
<https://drugfree.org/article/how-to-talk-with-your-kids-about-vaping/#>

References:

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/national-survey-shows-encouraging-decline-overall-youth-e-cigarette-use-concerning-uptick-use>

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-notifies-companies-including-puff-bar-remove-flavored-disposable-e-cigarettes-and-youth>

<https://vapingdaily.com/>

<https://www.vapor4life.com/>

<https://truthinitiative.org/>

<https://tobaccofreelancastercounty.org/electronic-cigarettes/>

Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder

Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD) was developed and added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) to more accurately help diagnose young kids with a mood disorder that did not truly fit the bi-polar Disorder criteria. Prior to developing a more pin-pointed disorder, many of the kids with DMDD either went undiagnosed because they did not fit the necessary criteria for bi-polar disorder or they were mis-diagnosed with bi-polar disorder or with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).

DMDD is a mood disorder in which young kids and early teens have continual and extreme irritability, anger, and frequent temper outbursts.

Kids with DMDD are generally diagnosed between the ages of 6 and 10. To be diagnosed with DMDD, a child must have experienced symptoms continually for 12 or more months.

The symptoms of Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD) are much more than a kid having a bad day or being in a bad mood. Their symptoms are considered serious and severe.

Signs and Symptoms of Kid with DMDD:

- Explosive and reoccurring anger outbursts multiple times throughout a week
 - Angry outbursts / periods of rage
 - Fits of aggression towards others or property
 - Behavioral problems in school or at home
 - Bouts of physical violence
 - Verbal aggression
- Frequently irritable/agitated throughout the day most every day
 - Extreme irritability
 - Anger
 - Fluctuating moods that are unpredictable
- Trouble functioning due to irritability in more than one place such as at home, school or in social situations like outside on the playground with other kids
 - Unable to self-regulate emotions
 - Unable to refocus attention

DMDD can disrupt and damage the life of a child, often interfering with their ability to learn. It may also put a strain on family relationships and interfere with the child's ability to develop normal and healthy friendships and peer relationships. They also may have a hard time in social settings or participating in activities such as team sports. If you think your child has DMDD, it is essential to seek a diagnosis and treatment.

Over time, as children grow and develop, the symptoms of DMDD may change. For example, an adolescent or young adult with DMDD may experience fewer tantrums, but may begin exhibiting symptoms of depression or anxiety. As a result, treatment may also change over time.

Treatment for DMDD:

Psychotherapy/talk therapy is the main form of treatment. There are 2 types of therapy generally used.

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**
 - Helps to teach kids to boost their ability to handle frustration without having an outburst. It also helps teach coping skills for controlling anger and ways to recognize and address the distorted perceptions that contribute to outbursts.
- **Medication**

Medications are sometimes used to alleviate some of the symptoms associated with DMDD, however, there are no medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for treating children or adolescents specifically with DMDD.

Tips for Parents

- **Research and learn about the disorder.**
 - The more you know, the better equipped you will be at helping and supporting your child.
- **Talk to your child's teachers and therapist.**
 - Collectively, you can develop strategies, plans, and accommodations that can help your child at home and in school settings.
- **Take care of yourself and manage your stress.**
 - Take steps to manage and relieve the stress caused by DMDD

To learn more about DMDD or other mental health disorders, please view the links below or go the SCIP website at www.scipnebraska.com.

childmind.org › guide › major-depressive-disorder

www.chop.edu › conditions-diseases › major-depressio

www.nimh.nih.gov › health › topics › disruptive-mood...

www.webmd.com › Bipolar Disorder