

Cyberbullying Awareness

According to the Pew Research Center, nearly half of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 (46%) report they have experienced some form of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. According to stopbullying.gov, a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation and in some incidents, cyberbullying can have legal implications. The most common places where cyberbullying occurs are on social media apps like Snapchat or TikTok, text messaging or messaging apps, online forums or chat rooms, email, and online gaming communities.



As a means to prevent and stop cyberbullying, it is important to understand how kids and teens may experience cyberbullying. Common tactics may include:

- Posting comments or rumors about someone online that are mean, hurtful, or embarrassing.
- Threatening to hurt someone or telling them to kill themselves.
- Posting a mean or hurtful picture or video.
- Pretending to be someone else online in order to solicit or post personal or false information about someone else.
- Creating a mean or hurtful webpage or social media profile about someone.

Some cyberbullying activities cross the line into criminal behavior and should be reported to law enforcement. Below are some examples:

- Threats of violence
- Child pornography or sending sexually explicit messages or photos
- Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
- Stalking and hate crimes

Our youth have almost constant access to their devices and unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time and be perpetrated by anonymous sources. As such, it can feel more persistent, making it challenging for teens and children who experience cyberbullying to escape it and find relief. Effects from cyberbullying may include changes in school performance, peer relationship struggles, low self-esteem, changes in mood, and a decline in mental and emotional health, including thoughts of suicide. Youth may also experience physical effects such as somatic complaints (i.e., headache, stomachache), or changes in eating and sleeping habits.

Support from parents and other caring adults is key to preventing cyberbullying. Parents and caregivers can play a vital role in helping to guide and mentor youth as they learn to navigate the digital world. Experts recommend engaging in regular communication and checking in frequently with kids and teens about their online experiences to help address any potential risk of cyberbullying or harm. Below are some tips to help protect children and teens from harmful digital behavior:

- Set clear expectations about digital behavior, content, apps, and online reputation.
- Educate about the harmful effects of cyberbullying, posting hateful speech or comments, sexting, and sharing naked photos of themselves or others (including potential legal issues).
- Be clear about what content can be viewed or shared as well as who they can friend and interact with on social media and gaming platforms.
- Model positive, respectful digital behavior on your own devices and accounts.
- Stay up-to-date on the latest apps, social media platforms, and digital slang used by children and teens.

If you are worried a young person in your life is experiencing cyberbullying, there are many helpful resources available to offer further guidance. Check out the links below to learn more.

What To Do when your Child is Cyberbullied: Tips for Parents from the Cyberbullying Research Center: <https://cyberbullying.org/tips-for-parents-when-your-child-is-cyberbullied.pdf>

How to Prevent Cyberbullying: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers and Youth from stopbullying.gov: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Cyberbullying%20Guide%20Final%200508.pdf>

Family Digital Wellness Guide from the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School: <https://digitalwellnesslab.org/parents/family-digital-wellness-guide/>

References: American Psychological Association; Commonsense Media; Cyberbullying Research Center; Pew Research Center; Stopbullying.gov

Failure in Monitoring THC – When is It Hemp?

As most already know, the Nebraska Hemp Farming Act formally legalized hemp in Nebraska. In doing so, it borrowed language from the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, which is what legalized hemp on the federal level. These laws categorize legal hemp as products derived from the cannabis plant, which contain less than .3% tetrahydrocannabinol, colloquially referred to as delta-9 or THC. Those products containing a greater concentration than .3% are considered marijuana, and remain a controlled substance at both the federal and state level. In the wake of this legalization, a slew of smoke-shops have cropped up, advertising “legal weed” in the forms of delta-8 and delta-10 products. These compounds, due to being far less potent and having weaker psychoactive effects than delta-9, are legal under the Farm Act, as long as their THC levels are within the legal range.

While there are many things to be aware of with these regulations, two in particular stand out. The first is that certain products have much higher densities than others. For instance, gummies are extremely dense for their size, meaning that their THC content can be very high while still remaining within the legal concentration. On top of this, edibles tend to take longer to take effect than other methods of consumption. This can lead to newer users taking multiple due to thinking that they weren’t strong enough, and ending up far more intoxicated than they intended to become. While these edibles are legal, they are misleading in how much of an effect they can have.

The other standout point is that **not every product is tested**. While all products are required by federal and state law to be under the .3% THC, not every sample is tested, which leads to some deviation from that .3% limit. Additionally, there have been allegations of falsified test results on hemp products, with the intent of hiding their true THC content. Corroborating these accusations, Nebraska has been engaging in investigations of many smoke shops in Sarpy and Lancaster Counties. Tests of several products in these stores found that they were far above the legal limit of THC, ranging up to 15% THC content, which is 50 times higher than what the law dictates. Authorities are continuing to monitor these locations, although they remain open despite their inventory having been illegal. Another study, which had 51 delta-8 products from both online stores and physical locations, found alarming results. It

was reported that 76% of those products tested contained delta-9 in greater concentrations than the federal limit. One of these products was found to be at 23% delta-9, which is 77 times the legal limit. This study also found that the substances that were more likely to have illegal concentrations of THC tended to be vapes and concentrates. Additionally, the illegal concentrations tended to be more likely in physical locations, rather than online platforms.

With these findings in mind, it's important to consider the repercussions of our lack of control of delta-9. Age checks are very often skipped, both with online platforms and physical locations. All forms of hemp can lead to long-term mental health effects, particularly in those taking it during youth. On top of this, with the unprecedented high THC concentrations in these, the effects on youth will be even stronger. It's important to discuss the long-term implications of any forms of marijuana use. While advertisements and popular culture would have you believe that delta-8 is a "weed-lite" experience, these ongoing investigations into delta-9 content show that what they're receiving is far stronger than they can know. While it's always a difficult task to keep youth substance free, making them aware of the risks is one of the greatest deterrents to substance use.

For information on marijuana use in youth, please check out these resources:

- <https://www.samhsa.gov/marijuana>
- <https://drugfree.org/article/vaping-and-marijuana-what-you-need-to-know/>
- <https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/>

NICOTINE

It has been well documented through research and surveys that most tobacco smokers/users began using before they were of legal age.

That fact helped spur and advance youth targeted prevention and education efforts over the last 20 years. This has led to a steady decline, over the past two decades, in the overall use of tobacco (cigarette and chew) among youth.

Indeed, it appeared we had turned the corner on the use of tobacco/nicotine use among youth. Taste, smell, and health concerns were three of the main reasons youth gave for not using.

However, tobacco companies did not idly sit back. They took this important information and used it to develop a more desirable product aimed at youth as well as adults, e-cigarettes/vaping devices, with the Juul being one of the most popular devices youth sought out.

With vaping devices, there was minimal to no lingering smell on clothes, or in spaces where youth would use these products, such as cars, home or even at school. In addition, there were dozens, if not hundreds of kid-friendly fruity and sweet flavors, eliminating the bad taste smoking often left in the mouths of users. And as we know, these products were advertised as healthy alternatives to smoking cigarettes. No cancer-causing tar or secondhand smoke effects.

Subsequently, we found out there are some very real and serious health risks associated with vaping, such as popcorn lung, that can lead to significant health problems and/or even death.

Fortunately, efforts to address old and new health concerns related to nicotine use helped push the legal age of use of nicotine products from 18 to 21 years of age in December of 2019. And the banning of flavors in many vaping devices went into effect in February of 2020.

In the last two or three years, we have begun to see a decline in nicotine vaping use among youth. Unfortunately, though, there are new concerns about the loopholes tobacco companies are exploiting that allow the flavoring in certain nicotine vape devices.

In addition to the current vaping concerns, we are starting to see an increase in the use of nicotine pouches among youth. While pouches have been around for quite some time their popularity and use among youth and adults alike has grown. They seem to be the next big trend in nicotine use since vaping exploded.

Unlike vaping, these products are allowed to have all sorts of flavors that range from mint flavors, fruity flavors, or even coffee flavors. Several of these nicotine pouch brands are packaged to resemble breath mint containers.

ZYN, is one of the most popular brands but there are several brands. On!, VELO, ROUGE are also very popular brands. (Below are 2 nicotine pouch brands that resemble breath mint packaging)



And while we continue forward with prevention efforts, we must also focus on intervention as well.

What can we do to help a teen/adolescent that is addicted to nicotine quit?

First, be supportive, encouraging and understanding. Quitting nicotine is not easy. After all, studies show it is as addictive as heroin.

Here are some simple techniques that might be helpful to someone who is addicted to nicotine and wanting to quit:

- **Exercise**...moving around and getting physical exercise can release the same kind of chemicals that your brain is craving from nicotine. This can be as simple as taking a walk, going on a bike ride, playing catch, etc.
- **Small, Simple Distractions**...nicotine cravings tend to intensify and grow stronger the more a person focuses/thinks about using. Take your mind off the temptation through small tasks like drawing/doodling, writing/texting, playing a board or card game, or listening to music.
- **Identify triggers**... For instance, waking up and going to bed are common times for someone to use. Other common times people tend to use are just before or after eating as well as times when people are feeling stressed.

Listed below are some links that focus on helping teens quit nicotine/tobacco use:

- <https://teen.smokefree.gov/>
- <https://teen.smokefree.gov/quit-vaping>
- <https://truthinitiative.org/curriculum>

In addition to the resource links above, below are additional links to sources referenced for this article that contain more information for parents on teen nicotine use and prevention.

https://scipnebraska.com/newsletters/current_newsletters/current-newsletters.html

<https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/topic/emerging-tobacco-products>

https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/trends-in-tobacco-use-among-youth.html

<https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/What-You-Need-to-Know-and-How-to-Talk-to-Your-Kids-About-Vaping-Guide-Partnership-for-Drug-Free-Kids.pdf>

https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/youth/index.htm