

## Youth Suicide Prevention

In Nebraska, suicide is the leading cause of death for ages 10-14. Nationally, suicide was the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for ages 10-24 in 2017 (10.6 per 100,000), according to a study completed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. This is a sharp increase (56%) from the steady suicide rate observed in 2000-2007 (6.8 per 100,000). These numbers are alarming, but there are ways to prevent youth suicide and it all begins with awareness and education.

### Risk Factors

There is not just one specific cause or predictor that would indicate whether or not a person is contemplating suicide. Several factors increase the risk of suicide. Possible risk factors include:

- Recent relationship loss; this may include the death of a loved one or a close friend moving away
- History of trauma or abuse; this may also include bullying or family violence
- Mental health or substance use concerns
- Family history of suicide
- Lack of social support
- Lack of access to health care, including mental health treatment
- Access to lethal means



### Warning Signs

The presence of one or more of the signs listed below may indicate an increased risk of engaging in suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness or feeling trapped
- Appears withdrawn or isolated from friends or activities they once enjoyed
- Extreme mood swings or increased irritability
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Giving away possessions

It is important to note that a person may not directly say that they want to die or they want to attempt suicide. They may say something like “The world would be a better place without me”. These feelings may also be expressed through a note or social media post. These comments need to be taken seriously and should not be kept secret. Encourage youth to talk to a trusted adult if they are concerned about something a peer said or posted online.

When a youth is displaying signs that they are contemplating suicide, calmly ask the person directly if they are thinking about suicide. Listen to the individual, validate their feelings and provide emotional support without judgment. Assure the person that they are not alone and that help is available. Do not leave the person unsupervised. Contact the parents or guardians of the student and get help. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 (1-800-273-8255). The Lifeline is supported by crisis

workers who help talk through the present situation and can assist in locating resources. If accessible, a suicide risk assessment may also be completed to determine the level of risk.

Connecting the student and their family to supports is crucial. There are multiple options for families to access treatment and support. Families may choose to meet with a therapist at a SCIP agency or find a mental health agency on their own. A physician can offer recommendations and discuss medications available. Depending on the severity of the situation, inpatient therapy may be necessary. Maintaining open lines of communication between the school and parents will help ensure the safety of the student. The schools can provide an extra layer of support by connecting the student to in-school supports, like a mentor or support group. A regular informal meeting with an adult the student has a close relationship with can also be helpful.

Talking to a person that is contemplating suicide can trigger our own fears and emotions. Do not hesitate to reach out for assistance and practice self-care. The same applies to youth that want to help a peer.

To learn more about how you can help prevent youth suicide, view the links below:

<https://www.nami.org/learn-more/mental-health-conditions/related-conditions/suicide>

Contact your area behavioral health region about participating in a free QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training. The mission of QPR is to save lives and reduce suicidal behaviors by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. QPR training provides an overview of the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade and refer someone to help. Find your regional contact here: <http://youthsuicideprevention.nebraska.edu/training/>

Attend the SCIP Spring Conference, “Help, Hope, Heal: Finding Light Through the Darkness” on March 27, 2020 in Lincoln, NE. [https://scipnebraska.com/trainings\\_and\\_events/conferences-and-workshops.html/event/2020/03/27/scip-spring-conference-/270072](https://scipnebraska.com/trainings_and_events/conferences-and-workshops.html/event/2020/03/27/scip-spring-conference-/270072)

#### References:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/well/mind/the-crisis-in-youth-suicide.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db352-h.pdf>

<https://save.org/about-suicide/>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide/>

# Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are organized activities that require a routine time commitment outside of regular school hours, such as being on a sports team (school team/club), 4-H club, band, Boy & Girl Scouts, church group, science club, drama club - the list goes on and on.

Extracurricular activities not only provide kids with structured and supervised instruction, but they also teach everyday life skills in a more practical and hands-on way.

And while extracurricular activities provide lots of benefits, like most things, they also have a downside to them as well. When making a decision about which activities to participate in, kids and parents should consider the pros and cons.

## The Benefits of Extracurricular Activities:

### **Higher Academic Success:**

There has been a multitude of research studies done that indicate kids who participate in extracurricular activities generally perform better in school than those who do not. Not only did kids have higher grades, better attendance and higher rates of graduation, these studies also show kids who participate in extracurricular activities also had more positive feelings overall about school and they had higher reported desire to continue their education beyond high school, according to researcher Douglas Reeves.

### **Explore & Develop Interests:**

Kids who participate in different extracurricular activities have additional opportunities to discover interests, skills and purpose beyond home and school. And while kids often have a wide range of subjects they can explore at school, extracurricular activities most times allow kids to explore an interest more in-depth than what they would get during school hours.

And when skills and interests are developed and enhanced, many times they can lead to a new interest that a student wouldn't have been exposed to or considered beforehand.

Many extracurricular activities also provide experiences that help develop and broaden a kid's perspective of the world, especially experiences that involve volunteering and/or providing community service to others. And in this day and age, and because of technology, developing a global understanding is becoming more and more necessary for kids to grow, maneuver and flourish as adults in the current and future workforce.

### **Better Physical & Emotional Health:**

When kids participate in extracurricular activities, they have less time and opportunities to consume media. Instead, they are physically and socially interactive, while learning and improving talents and life skills.

According to research, the average school-aged kid spends between seven to nine hours a day playing video games, online and/or watching TV. This can take a heavy toll on kids and their

well-being. It is well documented that social media, televised news and gaming all can have a negative impact on kids, including cyberbullying, increased anxiety and depression, and lack of sleep and exercise.

Furthermore, kids who are involved in extracurricular activities are less likely to indulge in illicit drug use/abuse. Not only do they have less free time, as boredom is one of the most common reasons kids give as to why they use illicit drugs, but they don't want to be kicked off a team or club and they want to do their very best when participating in their activities.

In addition, kids who participate in extracurricular activities tend to have a higher level of self-esteem. The more achieved success a kid experiences, the more their self-confidence improves.

### **Provide Social Opportunities:**

Let's face it, making friends can be extremely hard but one of the easiest ways to make friends is through extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for a kid to interact with other kids close in age who have a similar interest, which may help foster friendships outside of their normal group of friends.

Furthermore, being part of a club or team gives most kids a sense of belonging and a sense of pride.

Yet, there are certainly concerns and drawbacks to/for kids and families that are involved in a lot of extracurricular activities.

## **The Downsides of Extracurricular Activities:**

### **Time Commitment/Busy Schedule:**

Too many scheduled activities and very little free and leisure time can be detrimental. Playtime is important for young kids in learning to use their imagination and learning things on their own through play. And older kids also need free time to socialize as well as decompress and recharge.

Similarly, when your children go through a tough and tight schedule, which leaves no free time, it may lead to frustration, tiredness, and exhaustion. This may not only affect their academic performance but also the health of your little one. Thus, extracurricular activities are extra in nature and should be limited.

### **Extra Expenses with Extracurricular Activities:**

Extracurricular activities come along with their own expenses too. Almost always, regardless of the activity, there is an additional expense. Many activities have dues and/or there might be a cost for shoes and uniforms, musical instruments or the cost of travel. The list goes on and on.

### **Loss of Family Time:**

Maybe the biggest negative to extracurricular activities is the strain it puts on families. Extracurricular activities can put stress on the whole family. Many times, parents have to rush to transport kids to multiple, tightly scheduled activities. Not only is the kid who participates in

activities missing out on family time but often other kids in the home also miss out while parents are busy making sure everyone gets to their activities. All of the dropping off and picking up cuts into family time. Game and movie nights are canceled or continually moved around and meals are eaten on the go instead of at the dinner table.

With all of that being said, when parents and kids weigh the pros and cons of each extracurricular activity, they should figure out works best and is doable and fair for the entire family.

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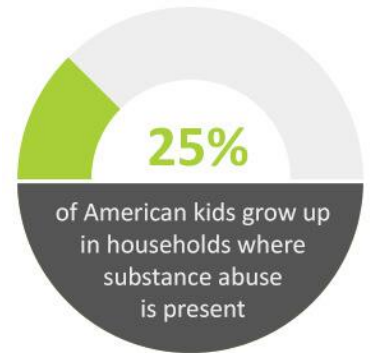
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[homeeducator.com](http://homeeducator.com) › [extracurricular-benefits](#)

## Substance Abuse and Addiction: The Ripple Effect

Alcohol and/or drug abuse can touch anyone, regardless of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that 25% of American kids grow up in households where substance abuse is present. Children and adolescents are deeply influenced by the people they are raised by and it is not surprising that in homes where one or more adults abuse alcohol or drugs, children are approximately twice as likely to develop addictive disorders themselves. While some view substance abuse and addiction as a personal experience, causing the most damage to the one using, research highlights the harmful effects that substance abuse can have on the entire family system. When a loved one abuses drugs and/or alcohol, everyday life can feel out of control.



Parental (or caregiver) substance abuse can adversely influence the development of children and future life outcomes. Recent research from Harvard Medical School affirms that children whose parents (or caregivers) abuse alcohol or use, produce or distribute drugs, face significantly higher risks of medical and behavioral problems. Parental and caregiver substance abuse has also been linked to a higher incidence of emotional and mental health issues in children.

According to the American Addiction Centers, children who grow up in a home where parental (or caregiver) substance abuse is present are more likely to experience:

- Poor school performance
- Emotional and behavioral problems
- Low self-esteem
- A higher risk of developing anxiety and depression
- Earlier onset of experimentation with drugs or alcohol

As drugs and/or alcohol become a caregiver's priority, children's basic physical, psychological and emotional needs may not be met, putting them at increased risk for emotional and mental stress. A family impacted by substance abuse can spiral into a dysfunctional system. According to SAMHSA, children may take on one or more "roles" as a means to cope in an unhealthy family environment. Typical roles include:

- **The Hero**- usually the oldest child and most identified with the parental role. They sacrifice and do the right thing. They make good leaders, are driven and successful and feel like they need to take on more responsibility, but internally struggle with feelings of anxiety, stress and loneliness.
- **The Adjuster**- rather than be in charge like the hero, the adjuster tries to fit in and adapt and rarely complains.
- **The Placater**- most sensitive to others' feelings and tries to meet others' emotional needs, neglecting their own.
- **The Scapegoat**- acts out negative behavior to express feelings he/she can't communicate and to distract the family from the parent/caregiver who is abusing substances.
- **The Lost Child**- usually a younger child who withdraws into a world of fantasy, music, video games or the Internet as a means to be alone. Their relationships and social skills may suffer.

- **The Mascot**- a younger or youngest child who manages fear and worry by being funny or cute to relieve family tension.

It should be noted that all of these roles may not be present in all homes where parental or caregiver substance abuse is present. Individual roles within the family may differ according to family structure (single-parent families, multigenerational families, stepfamilies, foster families, traditional nuclear families, etc.).

While addiction is now recognized as a chronic disease of the brain, the stigmas surrounding drug and alcohol abuse is a major factor preventing individuals from seeking and completing treatment. Due to the negative feelings that family, friends and the general public may carry about drug use behavior, parents and caregivers may be especially vulnerable to harsh labels, judgment and criticism because of the effects of substance abuse on their children. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt or fear over potential legal repercussions may discourage parents and children alike from reaching out for help. In other situations, parents and caregivers may be in such deep denial about their use that they may not be aware of the effects of their substance abuse on their kids. It is important to remember that addiction can distort the user's sense of reality making it difficult to see the chaos that has ensued within the family system. People can and do recover from alcohol and drug dependence problems and intervention is often the first step. Treatment can look different, depending on each individual's level of use, but most programs include providing life skills, behavioral therapy, relapse prevention strategies and peer support. Family therapy can help repair damaged relationships, teach healthy communication skills and improve the home environment. It may take multiple attempts to convince a loved one to agree to accept help.

Children of families experiencing alcohol or drug abuse also need attention, guidance and support. Teachers and school professionals are often on the frontline when it comes to recognizing when a family might be struggling and can serve as an avenue to offer supports and resources to students. Validating a child's experiences, listening and helping to connect kids to people and activities that will promote feelings of self-efficacy, and connecting youth and families to professionals who are trained to help, are important strategies of support. The National Association for Children of Addiction (NACoA) offers the following resource for schools: "Children Impacted by Addiction: A Toolkit for Educators"  
[https://www.addictionpolicy.org/hubfs/Kit4Teachers\\_Alt\\_2018-4.pdf](https://www.addictionpolicy.org/hubfs/Kit4Teachers_Alt_2018-4.pdf).

SAMHSA's National Helpline- 1-800-662-HELP (4357) also offers a free confidential, 24/7, 365- day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

References:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; American Addiction Centers; National Association for Children of Addiction (NACoA); National Institute of Health; National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); Psychology Today; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); The Journal of the American Association of Pediatrics.