

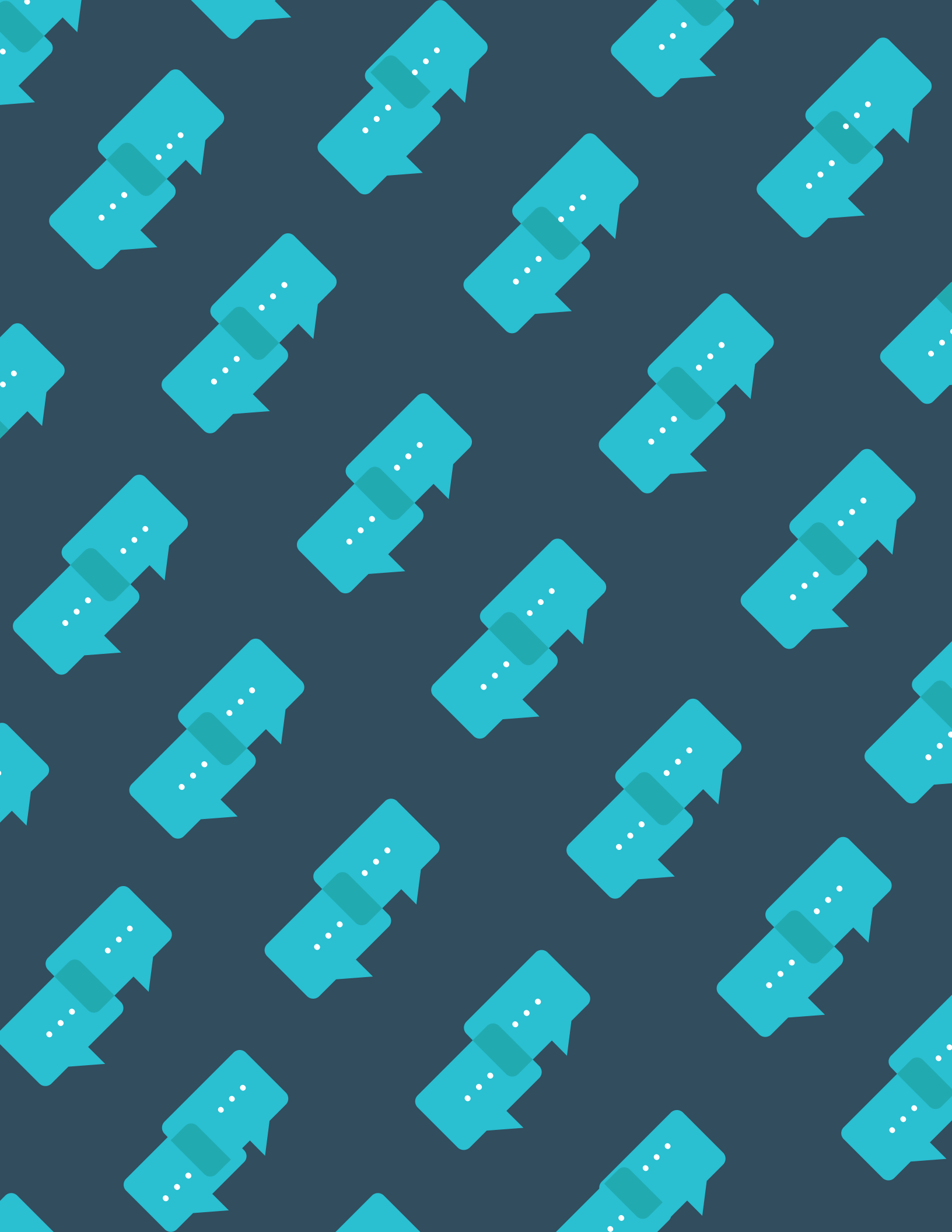
# THE PARENT HANDBOOK

**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
**VAPING**  
**ANXIETY**  
**DEPRESSION**  
**DRUGS**  
**ALCOHOL**  
**GAMING**

STANDARD EDITION

**MIDDLE | HIGH SCHOOL  
HANDBOOK**

OPERATIONPARENT.ORG





# operationparent

**Our mission is to love and support parents by providing real world information, connection, and hope.**

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Dear Parents and Friends,

Thank you for taking the time to read through this parent handbook! Way to go!

Our hope at Operation Parent is that this information will empower you to have many important conversations with your kids over the next several years.

Yes, it's a challenging world our children are growing up in. But here's the good news:

If you're a parent or caregiver, you are the number one influence in your child's life. That means you have the best opportunity to promote healthy living and prevent your child from making unhealthy decisions that often have long-term consequences.

If you're a grandparent, counselor, teacher, or someone who works with adolescents, you are that "one caring adult" that all kids need! Thank you for reading this handbook and providing "informed guidance" for the kids in your life.

We can all bolster our influence with every casual and courageous conversation we have with our children.

Be encouraged. You are one conversation away from:

- Preventing substance use and misuse
- Preventing mental health struggles
- Preventing social media drama

And be encouraged because you are not alone. Over 250,000 parents and caregivers are reading this parent handbook and talking to their kiddos too.

We've got this!



Jean Schumm  
President & Founder



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**CHAPTER 1**  
**A CALL TO PARENTS**

# RIGHTS

## *Did you know you have certain rights as a parent?*

- You have the right to be treated with respect.
- You have the right to raise your children according to your values and beliefs.
- You have the right to live in a drug-free home.
- You have the right to suspend your teen's driver's license.
- You have the right to know what's in your child's room, car, purse, and backpack.
- You have a right (and responsibility) to take these measures as you protect their health and safety.

# ROLE

Understanding that your primary role is that of a parent/caregiver, not as a friend, is a game changer during your child's middle and high school years. Unlike their friends that may come and go through the years, YOU are the only one who loves them enough to do whatever it takes to keep them healthy - physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. When we fail to exercise our authority as parents, our children become confused and vulnerable. Subconsciously, your child is counting on you to protect them. This is by design! No one else can provide the sense of security and protection you can. This is why as parents, we collect their cell phone at bedtime. It's why we secure our prescription medications and alcohol. It's why we wait up for them on Saturday night and make sure they come home safe and sober. This is what we do, and this is how we fulfill our role as a parent or caregiver. Your child may not thank you now, but they will later!

# RESPONSIBILITIES

Let's talk specifics. As parents, we're responsible for keeping our child free from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, for locking doors at night, for wearing seatbelts, and for providing a warm bed. We're responsible for encouraging (but not pushing) our children to participate in clubs, activities, and sports. We are to acknowledge their achievements and applaud their positive behavior. We are responsible for teaching our children morals and values including honesty, respect, compassion, patience, forgiveness, and generosity. We should teach our children that they have a responsibility to family, as well as to their school and community. Our discipline must be structured, consistent, predictable, and fair. To sum it up...we are to be responsible parents!

## **ROLE**

- Talk- Often, serious, silly, sad, happy; whatever they're facing
- Train- Chores, how to treat others, accountability, decision making, consequences
- Teach- Guide, direct, daily life lessons (on love, respect, kindness, giving, responsibility, and honesty)
- Time- Make the time, plan the time, invest the time, be intentional with the time
- Touch- Physically, mentally, and emotionally embrace your child (Sometimes they just need a reminder that you're there for them.)

## **RIGHTS**

### **Discipline**

training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character

#### **Reasons for Discipline:**

- Disobedience: starts at home; learn here what is expected outside of home
- Dishonesty: teach absolute honesty and integrity, be a person of character
- Disrespect: relationships in home/outside of home – value kindness and respect of others
- Danger: difference between correcting and rebuking; one is a gentle teaching and the other is necessary when danger is involved

### **Domain**

a territory over which rule or control is exercised

- **Household:** rooms, visitors, rules, freedoms
- **Material possessions:** phone, computer/iPad, clothes, etc.
- **Car:** rules for use, expectations, and responsibilities

### **Direction**

a guidance or supervision of action or conduct

- **Model it:** if we don't live it, our kids won't buy it
- **Explain it:** the "why" behind what we do
- **Expect it:** follow through with what is asked; establish consequences

## RESPONSIBILITIES

What must parents provide?

- Opportunities to build self-esteem
- Education (public, private, home school)
- Basic needs (food, water, shelter, medical care, clothing, privacy)
- Guide and teach morals and values (home, school, public, relationships)
- Safe environment (loving, respectful, encouraging, teaching, secure)

**“FIRST AND  
FOREMOST, WE  
NEED TO BE THE  
ADULTS WE WANT  
OUR CHILDREN TO  
BE.”**

**–BRENÉ BROWN**

A photograph of three children walking outdoors. On the left is a young boy with dark curly hair wearing a light green shirt and a brown backpack. In the middle is a girl with long brown hair wearing a brown dress. On the right is a boy with short blonde hair wearing a striped shirt and a blue backpack. They are walking past green bushes and a building with windows.

## Your Child's Brain

# YOU'RE FIGHTING FOR TIME

During middle school and high school, it's easy to see major changes taking place on the outside: longer legs, bigger feet, wider hips, lower voices, facial hair, etc.

**But what's happening on the inside?**

# YOUR TEEN'S BRAIN IS GOING THROUGH MASSIVE CHANGES RIGHT NOW!

**1.** Your teen may take more risks, express stronger emotions, and make impulsive decisions.

## WHY?

Because their brain is developing from the back to the front, forcing them to rely on the wrong part of their brain to make decisions. It's not their fault so be prepared to extend lots of grace. When they say, "I don't know why I did that," they are often telling you the truth.

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, AACAP.org, this stage of adolescent brain development means they are more likely to:

- Act on impulse
- Misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions.
- Get into accidents of all kinds.
- Get involved in fights.
- Engage in dangerous or risky behavior.



Their stage of brain development also makes them **LESS** likely to:

- Think before acting.
- Consider the consequences of their actions.
- Change their dangerous or inappropriate behavior.

**\*PARENTS-** this does not mean we simply give up on them during this time, or that they are incapable of making good or “right” decisions! However, adults need to be aware of this important phase of development so we can better understand, anticipate, and manage adolescent behavior.

**2.** Your teen needs you to promote positive brain development.

#### **HOW?**

**Sleep** - Help them get the sleep they need (make them feel safe, keep their cellphone at night)

**Activities** - Help them identify activities they enjoy...art, music, sports, language (find a limit for screen activities and allow for “down” time)

**Family Support** - They need you more than ever (family meals, boundaries, encouragement)

**3.** Introducing alcohol or drugs right now can permanently change their brain development. Parents, you have the perfect “medical” reason to be firm and let them know that underage drinking or drug use is off limits while their brain is developing. No need to lecture; just be firm. You’re fighting for time right now. You can do it!



# TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR TEEN

1. Listen more than you talk. Everything sounds like a lecture to teens. Keep your statements short and simple.
2. Ask questions that promote independent thinking. "Since you want more freedom, what responsibilities are you ready to take on?" "What needs to happen between now and the next test?" "What options do you have for working things out with your friend?" "What ideas do you and your friends have for spring break?" "What do you want to save for when you start your job?"
3. Show respect for what your teen says.
4. Be specific with your praise. "You did a great job cleaning up the kitchen today!"
5. Drop everything when they're ready to talk... including your cell phone!
6. Use "I" statements when you're upset or disappointed with them. "I feel disrespected when you speak to me that way." "I feel scared when you are out past your curfew."
7. Never discount their feelings. "I can understand why you would feel that way."
8. Ask open-ended questions. "What happened when you gave your presentation?"
9. Use "I" statements to express understanding. "I know you must be feeling..." "I understand." "I can sympathize." "I've noticed."
10. Criticize the behavior, not your teen. "When you don't clean your room, I feel frustrated and unimportant." This is much better than "You are so lazy for not cleaning your room."



CHAPTER 2  
**21ST CENTURY  
TECHNOLOGY**

# ROLE

When it comes to technology, our role as parents is to protect. Here are a few ways:

## PASSWORDS

- Make sure you have all their passwords (this is for their protection).
- Let your child know that they should not share their passwords with anyone, even friends.

## BOUNDARIES

- Check out the “parental control” features on any device your child uses.
- No phones at mealtime.
- Cell phones handed over before bedtime.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

According to the tech experts from

Google, Facebook, and Twitter, parents shouldn’t let their kids on social media until high school. At the very least, most social media platforms recommend waiting until age 13. (Rhodes, 2020)

## APPS

- Sit with them and ask them to show you what apps they have on their phone.

## SEXTING/PORN

- Talk to them about the information in this parent handbook.

## GAMING

- Ask yourself, “what will this game teach my child”? Set limits to the time spent on video/phone games and educate yourself before allowing them to play new games.

# RIGHTS

It is extremely important to exercise your parental authority regarding your child’s technology use. They will want all the devices and apps their peers are using, but “everyone has it” should not be a compelling argument for parents and caregivers. We need to convey that we have knowledge on these digital tools, and we are going to use our knowledge to protect them! We cannot risk a child’s innocent curiosity to sites that are overridden with dangerous adults, and dangerous adult content.

# RESPONSIBILITIES

- You are responsible for having your child’s passwords.
- You are responsible for setting parental controls.
- You are responsible for knowing who your child is gaming with and chatting with online.
- You are responsible for modeling responsible use of technology and social media.
- You are NOT responsible for replacing their devices when lost or damaged.

# SCREEN TIME

## DOPAMINE

A chemical released in the brain that brings pleasure. Flows in the brain in response to rewards and stimulation.

## HIGH DOPAMINE ACTIVITIES (HDA)

Are instantly and constantly stimulating.

**On Screen:** video games, social media, pornography

**Off Screen:** drugs, alcohol, gambling

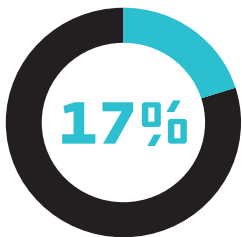
## LOW DOPAMINE ACTIVITIES (LDA)

Require delayed gratification

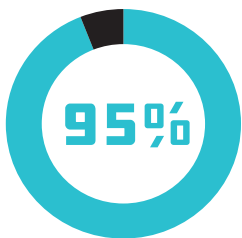
**On Screen:** typing a paper, creative apps like Photoshop/Canva, computer programming

**Off Screen:** exercise, homework/studying, board games, reading

According to Dr. Clifford Sussman, it is important to help teens balance HDA with LDA. Too much of any High Dopamine Activity has a remaining effect on the brain. Over time the brain will develop a tolerance to dopamine, requiring more dopamine to bring the same amount of pleasure. This leads to a growing disinterest in low dopamine activities such as schoolwork and off-screen hobbies. (Clifford Sussman, 2020)



According to Common Sense Media, use of screen media is up 17% for tweens and teens since the start of the Covid pandemic. (The Common Sense Census, Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021) (NIAA, 2021)



Up to 95% of youth ages 13–17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media “almost constantly.” (Vogels, Gelles-watnick, & Massarat, 2022)



There is a relationship between high amounts of screen time and depression in adolescence. (Boers, Afzali, & Newton, 2019)



# WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

## LOOK INTO THE “BARK” PHONE FOR TWEENS AND YOUNG TEENS.

- This is a great first step into phone ownership without the full freedom of a standard smartphone. Check out [www.bark.us](http://www.bark.us)!

## SET SCREEN TIME BOUNDARIES

- Make or purchase an “Unplugged” box. All cell phones placed in box during family meetings, mealtimes, social gatherings. Be present with each other!

## POWER DOWN 1 HOUR BEFORE BEDTIME. 4 REASONS WHY:

1. The “blue light” from screens suppresses melatonin which induces sleepiness. (Newsom & Singh, 2023)
2. Stimulation and stress keep minds awake
3. Missing sleep can be a precursor to weight gain, impaired cognition, memory, and decision making
4. Kids may text all night, make plans to sneak out, or struggle with drowsiness in school

## DOWNLOAD A FAMILY MEDIA AGREEMENT / DIGITAL USE CONTRACT

Decide together what boundaries will be established. Tape the plan somewhere your family can see (inside snack cabinet, refrigerator, etc.) You can start by visiting [commonsensemedia.org](http://commonsensemedia.org) and search “family media agreement”.

## CREATE “TECH-FREE” ZONES IN YOUR HOME, AND LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

- Family mealtimes
- Family social gatherings
- Bedrooms

## DIGITAL DETOXING

- Take a family break from phone usage or social media one step at a time.

## PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO HOW YOUR CHILD ACTS DURING/AFTER ONLINE ACTIVITY.

- Do they act out, or isolate?
- What is being taught at the sites they visit or the games they play?
- Their behavior could be a clue that they need help with balancing their time on screens.
- Watch and play together! Know what your kids are watching/playing and ask them questions about it, sit and watch them play, and even play if you can! This will demonstrate your genuine interest in their interest.
- Set Parental Controls on your teen’s phone, tablet, and/or gaming system. There are many helpful guides and videos to help caregivers set up the appropriate parental controls. Parental controls are not perfect, but they provide an important guardrail for kids.



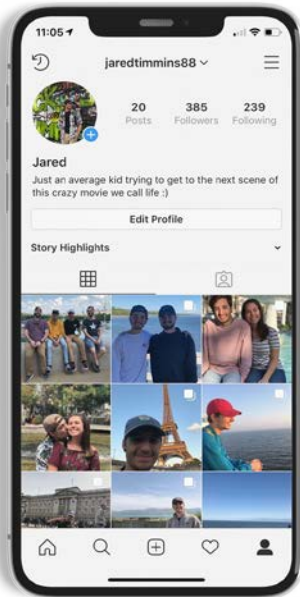
## SOCIAL MEDIA RED FLAGS

Keeping up with social media trends can be exhausting! Once you understand how your child uses Instagram, they want to download TikTok and Snapchat. However, there is hope! Understanding some key social media features can help you gain confidence when deciding if it's right for your teen, and how to talk with them about these app features.



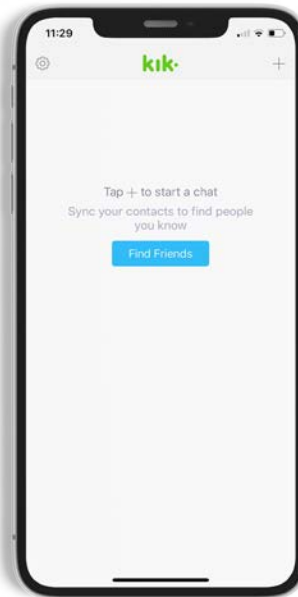
Type of App	Example	Why it's Popular	Potential Problems
<b>TEXTING</b>	GroupMe Messenger WhatsApp Kik Discord	No message limits or fees with basic features; users can also send photos, videos, calendar links, audio messages (depending on app).	Intended for older teens, adult themes, constant connection, stranger danger with chats.
<b>PHOTO AND VIDEO SHARING</b>	Instagram Tik Tok	Fun filters and effects, lets users snap, edit and share photos and 15-second videos publicly or privately; Very popular for teens and notable for it's addictive quality and high engagement, TikTok allows users to create, watch, and share short videos.	Swearing and sexual content are commonplace.  Creepy comments, and public profiles offer exposure and approval from "fans".
<b>BLOGGING</b>	Tumblr X ( Formerly Twitter)	Tumblr users create and follow short blogs that include text, photos, video, and audio clips. X allows users to post 140-character messages. Teens keep up with news and celebrities using X.	Most teens have public X accounts. Updates appear immediately so impulsive teens can get in trouble quickly.
<b>LIVE STREAMING &amp; CONTENT CREATION</b>	Houseparty Live.me YouNow YouTube Twitch	A way for groups of teens to connect via live video, earn currency from fans, comment, get lots of viewers, start trending and grow fan base.	Associated with Tik Tok, inappropriate content shared, predatory comments, kids making poor decisions to gain popularity.
<b>SELF-DESTRUCTING &amp; SECRET</b>	Snapchat Whisper	Lets users put a time limit on the pics and videos sent before they disappear; Whisper is a social "confessional" app that allows users to post whatever's on their minds, paired with an image, giving teens an anonymous outlet without fear of judgment.	Snapchats do not go away forever; can be screenshot and encourages sexting. Lots of "iffy" content in Snapchat's Discover feature. Whispers are often sexual in nature; content can be dark; app encourages users to exchange personal information.
<b>CHATTING MEETING DATING</b>	Tinder Monkey MeetMe Yubo Amino	Ex: Users have 10 seconds to live video-chat with strangers, fast-paced communication, guaranteed attention, accept or reject profiles of other users, etc.	Lots of teens using, teens can accept or reject a chat; open networks that open the door to potential trouble; lots of contact info requested at registration.

# A CLOSER LOOK



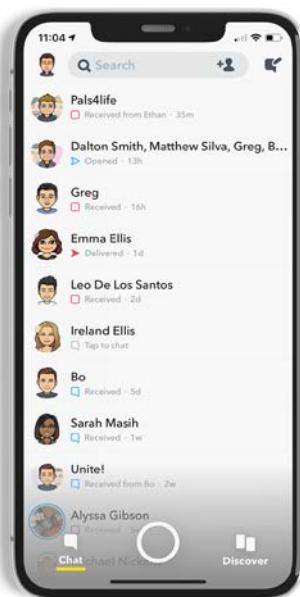
## INSTAGRAM

Photo and video sharing app for smart phones. Kids can instantly share their photos on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, etc. Photos can look amazing using digital “filters”. Followers then “like” or “comment” on them.



## KIK

Messaging app that provides a life-like chat experience. Users can send videos and share images.



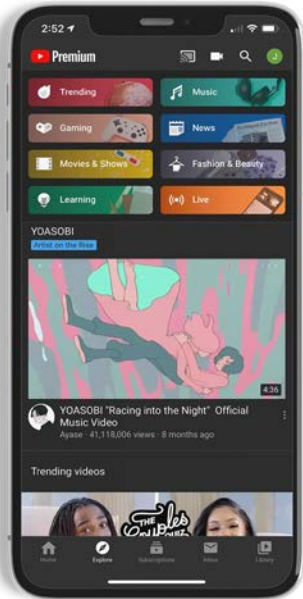
## SNAPCHAT

Take a photo or short video, add text or a doodle and send it to friends to view for 1 to 10 seconds. Privacy is questionable because the photos can be screenshot and saved by the recipient.



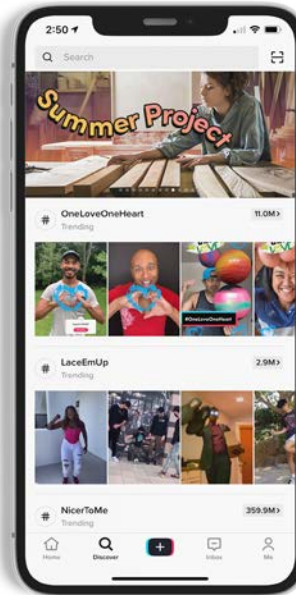
## DISCORD

A voice, video, and text chat app. The platform uses servers that can be joined based off certain themes and interests. The app was originally geared towards gamers but has since gained popularity as another social network.



## YOUTUBE

This is the most popular mobile music and video app in the United States. Chances are your child is spending at least one hour per day watching YouTube videos. There are actually five YouTube apps: YouTube, YouTube Kids, YouTube Music, YouTube Studio and YouTube TV. Which one is your child using?



## TIK TOK

Created by developers in China, the U.S. Department of Defense is encouraging its employees to avoid installing the app. Swearing and sexual content are commonplace. Creepy comments and public profiles offer exposure and approval from “fans”.



## X (FORMERLY TWITTER)

Microblogging service that enables users to send and read “real time” text messages up to 140 characters. Posts are personal, rapid, and used by celebrities. X offers brief content and/or pictures and a broad audience.



## BEREAL

This photo sharing app allows users to post one unfiltered photo per day to show their followers what they are doing in real-time. Every day at a different time, everyone captures a photo within 2 minutes. Capture and post in time to discover what your friends are up to.

# SEXTING

## COMMON REASONS TEENS SEXT

- Flirting
- Experimenting with their sexuality
- Consensual between dating partners
- Impulsive - Just for the shock value
- Pressure, blackmail, bullying or threatening

## POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXTING

- Forwarded to others (possibly tool for bullying/harassment)
- Emotional toll (anxiety, fear, depression)
- Blackmail (sextortion)
- School or legal involvement
- Shaming / social isolation / suicide

## TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THINKING BEFORE SHARING.

- Could this photo/video get me in trouble?
- Could it get a friend in trouble?
- Will this create drama?
- Am I okay if everyone shares it?
- Will I be okay if my family sees it?
- Will it still feel right a year from now?

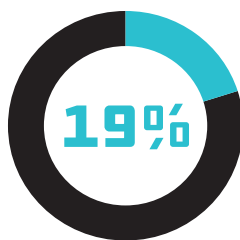
## RELATED TERMINOLOGY

### Revenge Porn-

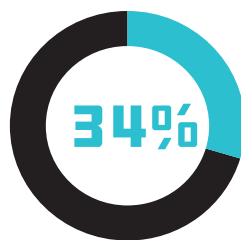
The act of sending out another person's nude pictures or videos of the person naked or involved in a sexual activity to get revenge or express anger. Revenge porn may be considered criminal activity depending on your local laws.

### Slut-shaming-

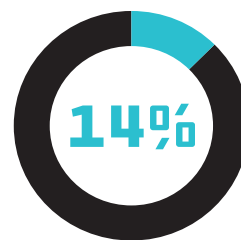
Sexting can lead to this form of cyberbullying where girls are targeted on social media and bullied for their sexual activity. Girls are often ridiculed for the way they look, the way they dress, and their presumed level of activity.



**19.3%** of teens had sent a sext



**34.8%** of teens had received a sext



**14.5%** of teens had forwarded a sext without consent

\*\* Mori, Park, Temple & Madigan; 2022

# TALK WITH YOUR KIDS ABOUT SEXTING

## TIPS BEFORE TALKING:

- Pick a good time and place
- Stay calm and curious
- Ask questions
- Try not to be judgmental
- Encourage them to think it through

## ASK WHAT THEY KNOW, THEN EXPLAIN WHY SEXTING IS A BAD IDEA.

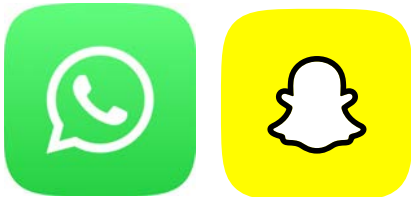
- Discuss/Ask what they should do if someone asks them to send a sext
- Ignore the request, don't respond
- Collect evidence (screenshot the request)
- Block the person
- Consider contacting police or Cyber Tip Line 800-843-5678

## WHAT SHOULD THEY DO IF THEY RECEIVE A SEXT OF SOMEONE THEY KNOW?

- Let the person know that a photo or video is being circulated
- Tell the person who sent it that it is wrong and to delete it
- Report it to the site
- Tell an adult (hopefully you)

## SNAPCHAT & WHATSAPP- POPULAR SEXTING PLATFORMS FOR TODAY'S YOUTH

Due to the disappearing messages/picture feature, these popular apps have gained popularity with those involved in sexting. When messages are sent, they disappear a few seconds after opening. This feature can create a false sense of protection, as the receiver of these explicit messages can take a screenshot (which the sender will be notified of) or simply take a picture of the sext with another device. This allows the receiver to keep the image and share with as many people as they like in mere seconds!



# PORNOGRAPHY

Pornographic content can harm children. Exposure to pornography at an early age may lead to poor mental health, sexism and objectification, sexual violence, and other negative outcomes. When children view porn that contains abuse and misogyny, they may come to view such behaviors as normal and acceptable. (Unicef, 2021)

Adolescents are exposed to many sexual images and messages on television that are almost universally presented in a positive light with little discussion of potential risks and adverse consequences. (Gruber & Grube, 2000)

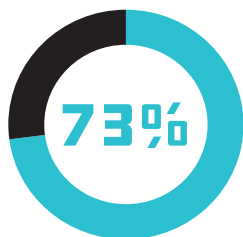
## FIVE WAYS PORN MAY DISTORT OUR MINDS:

1. Decreases sexual satisfaction. It trains us to desire the variety and “designer sex” of porn more than the realistic consensual experience of a committed relationship.
2. Disconnects us from real relationships. It detaches emotional involvement from sexual experience.
3. Lowers our view of women. Trains us to see women as sexual commodities.
4. Desensitizes us to cruelty. Numbs us to the seriousness of verbal and physical aggression.
5. It’s addicting. It taps into the neurocircuitry of our brains, making us crave the rush of sexual energy from porn again and again. This often leads to the search for more intense/violent pornography.

## 3 FACTORS DRAWING KIDS TO PORN:

The late psychologist, Dr. Al Cooper, believed three main factors draw people into online sexual activity:

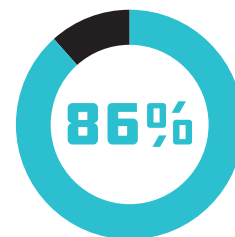
1. Anonymity: Home computers and smartphones have made it very easy to be secretive.
2. Accessibility: Pornography is accessible from any internet connection.
3. Affordability: Millions of free images are available online.



**73%** of youth (age 13-17) have seen online pornography. (Mann, 2023)



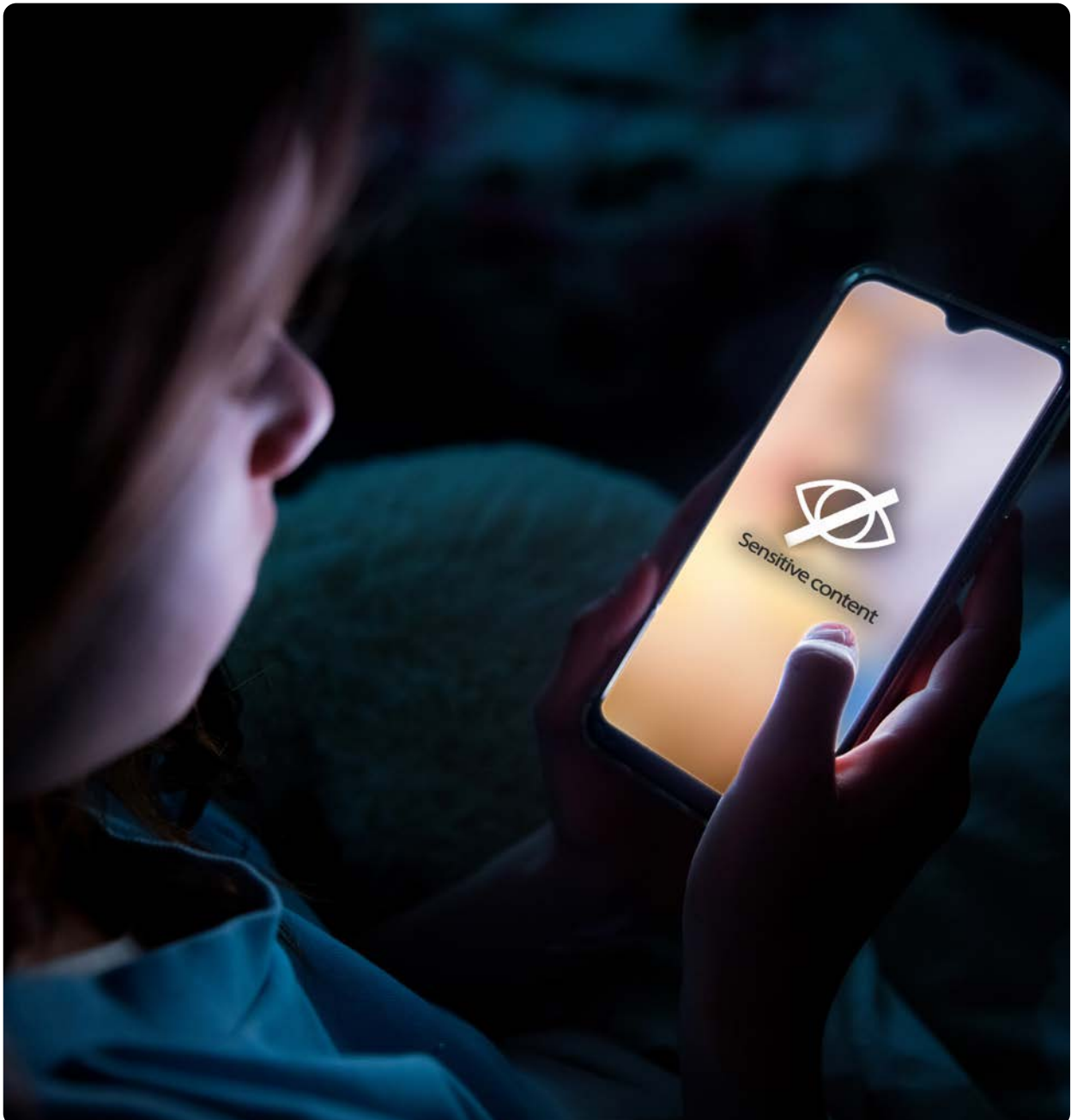
**54%** reported seeing it by the age of 13. (Mann, 2023)



One of the largest porn websites reports that **86%** of their site traffic is from cellphones. (Giordano, 2022)

### GOALS FOR PARENTS

1. Delay seeing porn as long as possible, especially while their brains are still developing.
2. Talk to your teen or tween and remember that the goal is to let them know that ideas they get from porn can be damaging when it comes to real sex. Do not shame or moralize.
3. Use parental controls and limit screen time.
4. Keep digital devices out of bedrooms as much as possible.





# ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION & ABUSE

## WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW:

Sexual abuse is increasingly facilitated by technology.

The National Human Trafficking Hotline has recorded recruitment in all types of sex and labor trafficking on social media platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Kik, Meetme.com, WhatsApp, and dating sites/apps like Tinder, and Plenty of Fish. Traffickers may build an intimate relationship with a victim through social media or advertise fake or deceptive job opportunities. (Polaris Project, 2019)

Studies show that the average age for recruitment into the commercial sex trade is 11-14. (Jordan J., 2013)

## ONLINE GROOMING

Online grooming occurs when someone befriends a child online to take advantage of them for sexual abuse or other forms of child abuse. Online groomers:

- Frequently build fake profiles pretending to be the age of their targeted victim.
- Build trust with vulnerable children by talking about similar interests, complementing, and sometimes by sending gifts.
- Once trust is established, they will try to bring up sexual topics in conversations.
- Will attempt to set up meetings with the child.
- May find their victims on social media or online games, then try to get the victim to switch to a private chat platform.

## SEXTORTION- A GROWING ONLINE PROBLEM

Sextortion occurs when someone threatens to share intimate details, sexual images, or videos of an individual online if they don't meet the demands. The FBI has seen a big increase in the number of cases of sextortion involving children and teens. Typically, the young person believes they are chatting with someone their own age, and after sending revealing material the trap is set. The criminal will then give the young person the choice to send more explicit material, or they will publish their private content. (Some extortionists will ask for money or threaten violence which has sadly resulted in deaths by suicide.) (FBI, n.d.)

## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD

- Talk to your child about not communicating with any strangers online! Explain that some people pretend to be someone they are not to gain their trust.
- Check that all their accounts are set to private, and that they don't have strangers as friends in a chat.
- Talk to your child about the seriousness and dangers of sending sexual/explicit images to anyone.
- Talk to your child about the dangers of anyone online setting up a meeting with them without your knowledge.
- Let them know that you are a safe adult for them to talk to if they are ever approached online by a stranger. If young people are being exploited, they are a victim and should report this crime. **Contact your local FBI office or 1-800-CALL-FBI.**

# GAMING

Gaming is the action or practice of playing video games. This is often done on a dedicated gaming console, PC, or smartphone. Gaming is not inherently bad. In fact, some games can contribute to positive development like problem solving skills, hand-eye coordination, decision-making, cooperation, and team building. Sometimes games can be a good outlet to simply de-stress. However, parents do need to be aware of the potential risks of gaming, especially when the game is connected to the internet.

### TIPS FOR PARENTS:

- Research gaming consoles before purchasing one for your child. If they already have one, do some research to educate yourself on what it has to offer.
- Check the ESRB rating (ESRB.org) and know what they mean before allowing your child to play the game. (Some popular games are loaded with mature content.)
- Play video games with your child so you better understand the content of what they're playing and build connection through shared experiences.
- Keep your gaming area in a public place in your home, and not in your child's room.
- Establish and enforce screentime limits.
- Listen and watch how they interact with other online players and go over online safety with them. Online games are full of people playing who your child does not know. Setting limits on who they can interact with may be the best option for your child.
- If you play video games, be a role model with the type of games you play, and how you interact with online players.
- Make sure to encourage activity outside of gaming.

### PARENTAL CONTROLS TO CONSIDER

- Block games based on the ESRB rating. Limit (or block) in-game purchases.
- Manage when and how long your child can play.
- Limit who your child can communicate with while playing.
- Disable the gaming console's internet browser.

Parental Controls DO NOT guarantee healthy gaming habits on their own, but they can be used as a tool to help you manage your child's gaming, even when you're not watching them. There are parental controls available for each gaming console and most popular games, but they are not always easy to set up or find. You can find helpful parental control guides on [ESRB.org](https://www.esrb.org), and [commonsensemedia.org](https://www.common sense media.org).

### KNOW THE SIGNS OF GAMING ADDICTION: *(The Bark Team, 2023)*

- Loss of interest in other hobbies
  - Falling grades
  - Aggressive behavior/mood swings
  - Isolation
  - Increased conflict with friends and family
  - Withdrawal symptom
  - Hygiene concerns
- 
- Constantly talking about video games

If you are worried about your child's gaming, start a conversation with them. Try to understand why they like it so much. Calmly explain your concerns and together come up with a plan to help balance their gaming habits with their responsibilities and other interests.



# “NEED TO KNOW” APPS & GAMES



## TWITCH

A video live streaming service that focuses on video game live streaming, including broadcasts of eSports competitions. Think YouTube, but the focus is live content. Twitch is for ages 13+. There are some parental controls you can set for your child’s account to weed out some mature content, however it’s always possible to run into content that you would not be comfortable with your child viewing. If your child has this app, ask them questions about it. “Who is your favorite streamer?” “What games are your favorite to watch being played?” “Do you ever connect with people on this app?”



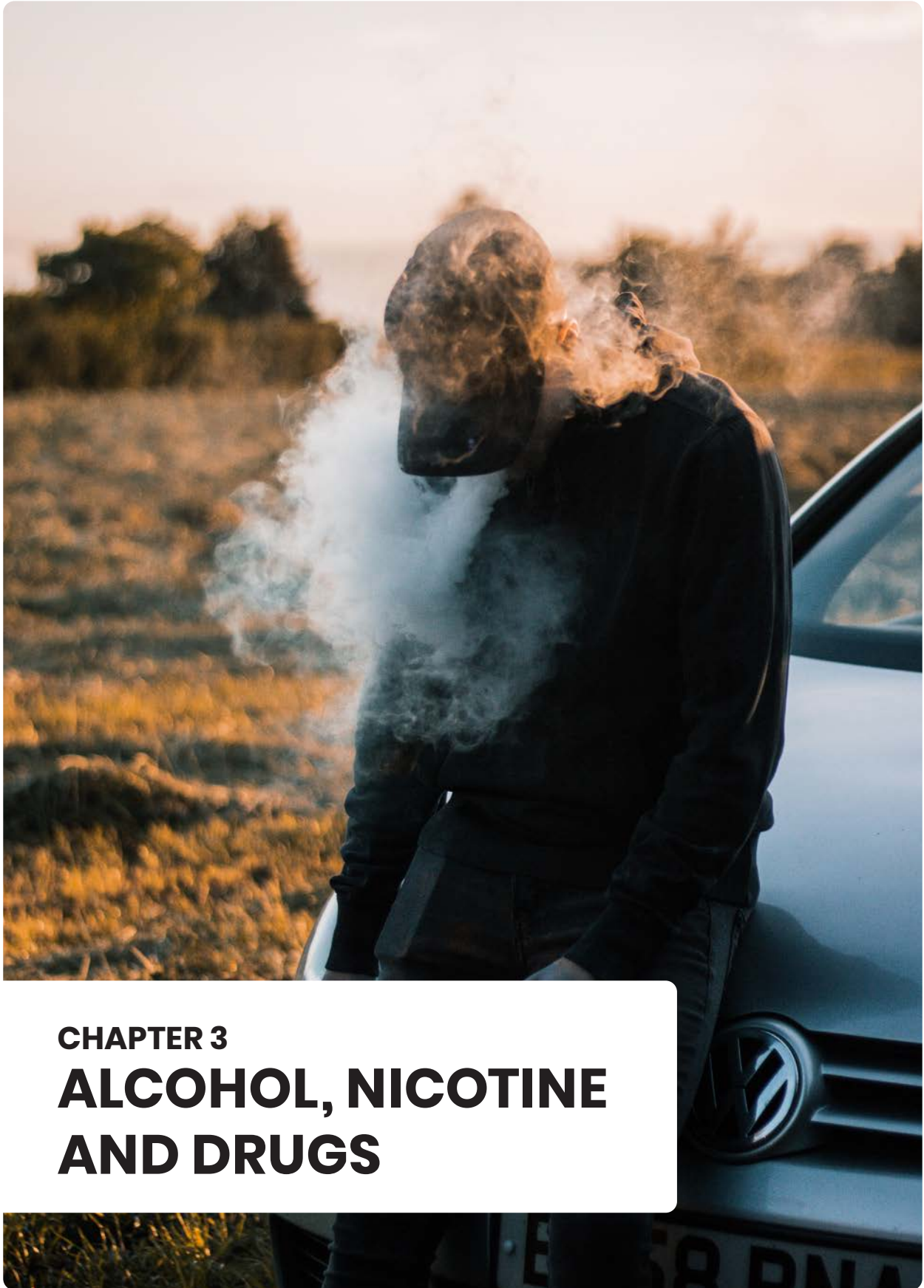
## DISCORD

A platform for people with similar interests to share and communicate. It is very popular among the gaming community as it offers a way for video game players to communicate outside of the game and develop a community. Users can join servers based on the particular focus or interest. These servers will allow communication with anyone within that server via text or voice chat. Because users may share images on text channels, or engage in voice chat, young users run the risk of exposure to inappropriate content.

Type of Game	Description	Examples	Considerations
<b>SANDBOX</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Players often have few concrete goals and narrative pathways</li> <li>• Variety of tasks you can accomplish in several different ways.</li> <li>• Simulation games are also increasingly touted as sandbox titles</li> </ul>	<b>Minecraft</b> <b>The Sims</b> <b>Grand Theft Auto</b> <b>Roblox</b> <b>Animal Crossing</b>	<p>Can encourage experimentation and creativity.</p> <p>Wide range of what is allowed in the game, so could include a lot of violence and sexual content or could be completely innocent. This is where parental controls can help!</p>
<b>SHOOTER</b>  <b>FPS</b> <b>FIRSTPERSON SHOOTER</b>  <b>TPS</b> <b>THIRD-PERSON SHOOTER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An FPS simulates a typical human viewpoint.</li> <li>• A TPS pulls the perspective back and showcases your entire character and surrounding environment</li> </ul>	<b>Call of Duty</b> <b>Halo</b> <b>Battlefield</b> <b>DOOM</b>	<p>Differing degrees of violence and gore in these types of games.</p> <p>Best to research game and learn about its rating.</p>

Type of Game	Description	Examples	Considerations
<p><b>BATTLE ROYALE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Type of shooter that has become increasingly popular where you're placed in an increasingly small area and must defeat everyone</li> </ul>	<p>Fortnite</p> <p>PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG)</p> <p>Apex Legends</p>	<p>Differing degrees of violence and gore in these types of games.</p> <p>Best to research game and learn about its rating.</p>
<p><b>ROLE-PLAYING GAME</b></p> <p>(RPG, ARPG, MMORPG)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The player takes control of a specific character and levels up through experience.</li> </ul>	<p>Fallout</p> <p>World of Warcraft</p> <p>Skyrim</p> <p>The Witcher</p>	<p>MMORPG is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game where you can interact with thousands of other players. This always brings the chance of unwanted/inappropriate encounters.</p>
<p><b>SPORTS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnerships with major sporting organizations, from racetracks to the field or court.</li> </ul>	<p>Madden NFL</p> <p>NBA</p> <p>Forza</p>	<p>Typically safe games, but important to take note of provided parental controls for online options.</p>





**CHAPTER 3**  
**ALCOHOL, NICOTINE**  
**AND DRUGS**

## ROLE

When it comes to alcohol and drugs, our role as parents is to protect. Here are a few ways:

- Secure or remove any alcohol or drugs in your home.
- If addiction runs in your family, talk to your child about this predisposition and its implications.
- Make sure your child knows that they can call you anytime they need an “out” if alcohol or drugs are offered at a party, school event, etc.
- Role play with your child on how to say “no” if offered drugs or alcohol.

## RIGHTS

- You have the right to establish a zero tolerance for underage substance use based on the science of brain development.
- You have the right to live in a drug-free home.
- You have the right to search their bedroom, backpack, vehicle, etc. for alcohol and drugs at any time.
- You have the right to have your child drug tested if you suspect use.
- You have the right to contact law enforcement if you are aware of adults who are providing alcohol or drugs to minors.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

You are responsible for communicating a zero-tolerance position regarding underage drinking and substance use.

- You are responsible for the activities that take place in your home when you’re there and not there.
- You are responsible for calling parents who are hosting parties to confirm their presence and supervision.
- You are responsible for modeling healthy coping skills and helping them develop their own.
- You are responsible for getting your child assessed by a professional if you suspect drug or alcohol use.

# ALCOHOL

## YOUR ADVICE MATTERS!

It's never too early to talk to your preteens/teens about alcohol! Your advice has the best chance to influence their outlook on alcohol (and other substances) if you talk about it openly and honestly. Establishing and enforcing clear rules when they are younger will increase the likelihood of them accepting the rules when they are older teens.

### SAMPLE CONVERSATION STARTER:

Hey Quinn, do you have a minute? I want to talk to you about alcohol, because it's important that you understand what underage drinking does to your brain.

## HOW ALCOHOL AFFECTS THE TEEN BRAIN

Brain Plasticity and Drinking – The adolescent brain can readily change in response to experiences. This helps a young person have an incredible capacity for learning and growth, but this also makes them more vulnerable to short-term and long-term negative effects of underage drinking.

Underage drinking can lead to

- Poor performance in school
- Making poor decisions, engaging in harmful behavior (using other substances, drinking and driving, unsafe sexual behavior)
- Memory impairment
- Changes in the brain with life-long effects\* (CDC, 2022)



# KNOW THE FACTS

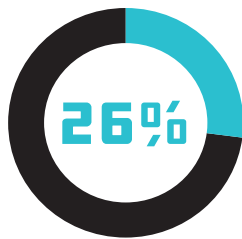
Young people who binge drink are more likely to use other drugs like marijuana or cocaine. (SAMHSA, 2022)

Excessive drinking is responsible for more than 225,000 years of potential life lost (among people under 21). (CDC, 2022)

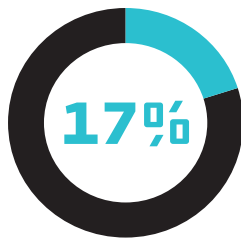
Kids who begin drinking before age 15 are 4 times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21. (NIAA, 1998)

Alcohol remains the substance most widely used by today's teens. (CDC, 2022)

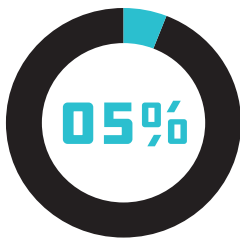
Underage drinking increases the likelihood of depression and anxiety disorders. (SAMHSA, 2022)



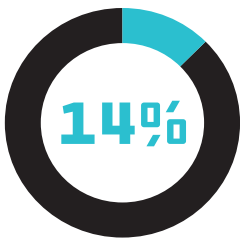
Nearly **26%** of adolescents report drinking by 8th grade. (NIAA, 2021)



**17%** rode with a driver that had been drinking in the past 30 days (CDC, 2022)



**5%** drove home after drinking in the past 30 days (CDC, 2022)



**14%** binge drank in the past 30 days (CDC, 2022)



**29%** drank alcohol in the past 30 days (CDC, 2022)



## WHERE DO TEENS GET THEIR ALCOHOL?

- Nearly 72% of teens who drink get their alcohol for free. Getting it from friends or family, at parties, or by taking it without permission. **(FTC Consumer Advice, 2013)**
- Those teens that do pay, are giving money to someone else to purchase the alcohol. **(FTC Consumer Advice, 2013)**

## PREVENTION STRATEGIES: WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Talk early and often!  
When kids know where their parents stand on alcohol, they are more likely to adopt/respect those beliefs.

Be clear and consistent when setting expectations and enforcing rules.

Be honest with your kids about their family history of alcoholism and addiction.

Make sure any alcohol in your home is accounted for and even locked up. Unmonitored alcohol can be a temptation for any young person.

Get to know your child's friends and their caregivers. Collaborate with their parents to ensure your children are where they are supposed to be, and safe!



## BEFORE APPROVING

Call to make sure parents (not just older siblings) will be home and supervising the entire time. Ask, "Will there be any alcohol or drugs available?"

Decide on a code word your child can use if they call you and want to be picked up early.

# TOBACCO, NICOTINE & VAPING

**What exactly is tobacco?** A plant with leaves that contain a high level of the addictive chemical, nicotine. Typically cured by a process of drying and fermentation for smoking and chewing.

**What is Nicotine?** An addictive poisonous chemical found in tobacco. When it enters the body through tobacco products, it causes increased heart rate, and can induce a sense of well-being and relaxation.

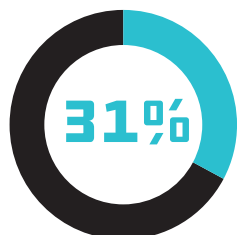
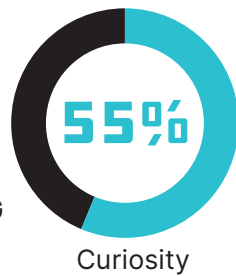
Teens and Preteens most commonly consume tobacco through e-cigarettes/vaping.

**Is vaping safe for my teens?** The answer is a resounding NO! The American Lung Association is very concerned that we are at risk of losing another generation to tobacco-caused diseases as the result of vapes/e-cigarettes.

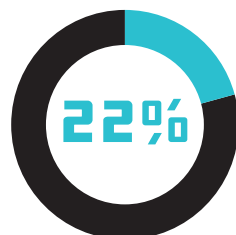
**Don't worry!** It is never too late to talk to your teen about the dangers of vaping. It is vital to teach them what vaping is, what vapes do, and why they should not use them.

## VAPING STATS

**MOST COMMON REASONS KIDS VAPE (AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION, 2023)**



used by friend or family member

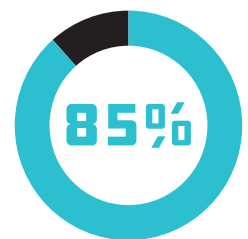


availability of flavors



Among current youth e-cig users, 1 in 4 use them daily. (FDA, 2022)

16.5% of high school students and 4.5% of middle school students reported current use of e-cigarettes. (FDA/CDC, 2022)



Almost 85% of current e-cig users use flavored e-cigs. (FDA, 2022)



## **WHAT IS AN E-CIGARETTE? (CDC, 2022)**

- Also known as vapes, mods, e-cigs, vape pens.
- Uses a battery to heat special “e-liquid” into a harmful aerosol that users inhale.
- The liquid inside the vape cartridge usually contains nicotine. Nicotine is not only highly addictive but can also harm adolescent brain development.
- Even vapes that claim to be nicotine-free contain trace amounts of nicotine. When the vaping liquid heats, more toxic chemicals are formed.
- Available in a variety of shapes and sizes.
- Some vapes come preloaded with liquid, others have disposable pods.
- Vapes can be used to inhale marijuana and other substances.

## **WHAT IS IN THE VAPOR/ AEROSOL PRODUCED BY VAPES?**

Since vapes have not been reviewed by the FDA, e-cig (vape) composition and its effects can vary. However, research has found the following toxic chemicals and metals in e-cigarettes:

- Nicotine - highly addictive; negatively affects adolescent brain development
- Cancer causing chemicals
- Chemicals linked to serious lung disease
- Toxic chemical used in antifreeze
- Heavy metals like nickel, tin, and lead
- Volatile organic compounds
- Ultrafine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs



Disposable



Disposable



Disposable



Disposable



All In One



Squonk Mods



Vape Pen



Vaporizers



Vape Pods



E-Cigarettes

## DISPOSABLES | ONE TIME USE Teen's Choice

The most commonly used device types are disposables. According to the CDC, disposable vape use went up 1000% among high schoolers who vape. Teens like them because they taste like, and last longer, than the once popular JUUL.

Disposables come in a variety of sizes and are measured by the amount of "puffs".

### Popular Brands:

Puff Bar, VUSE, Hyde, and Smok

# **CANNABIS/MARIJUANA**

## **THE MOST COMMON WAYS TO USE:**

- Smoked in joints (like a cigarette), in blunts (cigars), or in bong (like pipes).
- Vaped using devices like vape pens or other vaporizers along with cannabis liquid extract.
- Mixed or infused into foods or drinks (edibles) like cookies, cakes, brownies, teas, and alcohol.
- Dabbing (similar to vaping) is when a waxy concentrate of marijuana (hash oil, dabs, wax, butter), is heated to create a vapor to inhale. Dabs can have as much as 90% THC concentrate! (Partnership to End Addiction, n.d.)

## **DANGERS OF MARIJUANA ABUSE (CDC, 2021)**

### **ADDICTION**

- Rise in THC potency = Rise in addiction rate
- 1 in 6 teens who use marijuana regularly, become dependent

### **LEARNING**

- Developing teen brains are more susceptible to the harmful effects of marijuana and THC.
- Interferes with parts of the brain used for memory, learning, attention, coordination, decision-making and reaction time.
- Compared with teens who do not use, those who do are more likely to quit high school.

### **DRIVING**

- Impairs judgement, alertness, concentration, coordination, and reaction time.

### **MENTAL HEALTH (NIDA, 2020)**

- High potency THC is linked to temporary psychosis (not knowing what is real, hallucinations, and paranoia).
- Link between cannabis use and other mental illnesses and self-harm behaviors.



# KNOW THE FACTS

**FORGET THE MARIJUANA OF THE 80'S AND 90'S! PARENTS/ CAREGIVERS OFTEN AREN'T AWARE THAT THE AMOUNT OF THC IN MARIJUANA IS INCREASING.**

THC is the mind-altering chemical that makes the user "high".

When vaped or dabbed, these THC levels are significantly higher.



Marijuana comes from the cannabis plant, and is a dried mixture of the stems, flowers, seeds, and leaves, all of which contains over 100 compounds, including THC. (CDC, 2021)

**08%**  
8TH GRADERS

**19%**  
10TH GRADERS

**22%**  
12TH GRADERS

percentages reported last-year marijuana vaping (CDC, 2021)



In 2019, 4 in 10 high school students reported using marijuana in their lifetime. (CDC, 2021)



# SIGNS OF USE

## Physical Changes

- Bloodshot eyes
- Increased appetite
- Slowed reaction time
- Dry mouth
- Impaired coordination
- Sleepiness
- Odor of marijuana

## Productivity Changes

- Decline in school performance
- Dropping activities
- Less motivation
- Memory impairment

## Behavioral Changes

- Withdrawing from family
- Secretiveness and lying
- Abrupt change in friends
- Apathetic
- Needing more money
- Defensive
- Nervous or paranoid

## What to Do if You Suspect Use

- Wait until you are calm and have a plan
- Don't talk to your child about their drug use while they're under the influence
- Ask your child if they are using and why
- Investigate further
- Enforce consequences for negative behavior
- Follow through on the established plan
- Seek a professional behavioral health assessment
- Get help from a treatment or counseling organization or support group for yourself

### SAMPLE CONVERSATION STARTER:

**“If your friends wanted you to try a drug, how would you handle it?”**

**“What are you and your friends looking forward to this year? How would getting into trouble with alcohol or drugs change those plans?”**



## BUT, IT'S LEGAL...

**Legalization does not equal safe.** As more and more states legalize marijuana, it is critical for parents to communicate a strong and consistent “zero tolerance” message. Remember, their brain is still developing, making it more susceptible to addiction and adverse effects on brain development. It is best to keep an open dialogue with your child about the dangers marijuana use poses to them. If they are smoking to cope with stress or anxiety, help them find other ways to cope while protecting their health.

# PRESCRIPTION & OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS

**“PRESCRIPTION MISUSE” DEFINED:** “taking a medication in a manner other than prescribed; taking someone else’s prescription, even if for a legitimate medical complaint like pain; or taking a medication to feel euphoria (get high).”  
(NIDA, 2020), Know the Stats (U.S. Department of Justice)

## 3 MOST MISUSED TYPES OF MEDICATION:

### OPIOIDS

Prescribed to treat pain

### CNS DEPRESSANTS

(CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM)

includes tranquilizers, sedatives, and hypnotics used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders.

### STIMULANTS

Often prescribed to treat ADHD



2/3's of teens who reported misuse of pain relievers said they got them from their family or friends.  
(DOJ, N.D.)



Following marijuana and alcohol, prescription drugs are the most misused substance.  
(SAMHSA, 2022)



1 in 6 teens has used a prescription drug to get high or change their mood.  
(DOJ, N.D.)

22%

of teens say they have been given a prescription medication not prescribed to them by their parents.  
(DOJ, N.D.)

# SOCIAL MEDIA : A ONE-STOP SHOP (DEA, n.d.)

Drug traffickers are using social media to advertise and sell lethal fake prescription drugs, as well as other dangerous drugs. Due to their high usage of social media, teens are especially at risk for coming across exposure to drug trafficking on commonly used apps like Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook.

- **ADVERTISE:** often with emoji codes or code words to evade detection by law enforcement.
- **CONNECT:** prospective buyers respond to advertising by contacting the drug dealer on an app; many dealers then switch communication to encrypted apps like WhatsApp, Signal, and Telegram.
- **PAY:** After a deal is made, payment is requested using easy pay apps like Venmo, Zelle, and Cash App.

## WHY DO TEENS MISUSE MEDICATIONS?

- To get high
- To feel better
- To cope with anxiety and depression
- To help concentrate while doing schoolwork/get better grades
- To perform better in sports
- Curiosity
- Peer Pressure

## SIGNS OF MEDICATION ADDICTION

- Problems at school
- Unusually energetic or sedated
- Excessive mood swings
- Increase or decrease in sleep
- Poor decision-making
- Changes in behavior and friends
- Money issues
- Drug paraphernalia

# WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Talk often to your teen about the harmful effects of misusing prescription drugs.
- Safe storage and disposal can eliminate the easiest access a teen has, their home medicine cabinet.
- Monitor your child's social media. Know what apps they have, and how they use them. Drug traffickers are selling fake prescription drugs through commonly used apps. Many who purchase think they are buying a real prescription.
- Stay informed! Check out the One Pill Can Kill campaign from the DEA for up-to-date information on prescription drugs and our youth. ([DEA.Gov/onepill](https://www.dea.gov/onepill))

# OPIOIDS

## **WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?**

- Opioids are a group of drugs that include synthetic opioids (fentanyl), illegal drugs (heroin, illicit fentanyl), and legal powerful prescription pain relievers.
- Some prescription opioids are made from the opium poppy plant while others are made in laboratories. Misuse of legal or illegal fentanyl is dangerous and leads to addiction and dependence, and sometimes even overdose. (SAMHSA, 2020)
- Prescription opioid misuse includes taking medication prescribed to someone else, using medication in a way not prescribed, taking meds to feel high, or mixing medication with other substances.

## **COMMONLY USED PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS INCLUDE:**

- Hydrocodone (Vicodin®)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®)
- Morphine (Kadian®, Avinza®)
- Codeine
- Fentanyl

## **COMMON NON-PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS:**

- Heroin
- Illicit fentanyl

## **4 EASY WAYS KIDS GET HOOKED ON OPIOIDS:**

- Wisdom teeth removal
- Sports injury
- Grandparents' medicine cabinet
- Friends share pain medications

## **TRENDS:**

- Research shows that individuals who are prescribed opioids prior to graduating high school are 33% more likely to misuse prescription opioids after graduating. (SAMHSA, 2020)
- In 2021, approximately 80,411 people in the U.S. died from overdose involving an opioid. (CDC Wonder, 2021)
- Opioid misuse rates are increasing for those ages 18-25. (SAMHSA, 2020)

# FENTANYL

## WHAT IS IT?

- A deadly synthetic opioid being made into fake pills or cut into other street drugs to drive addiction.
- Fentanyl is 50-100 times stronger than morphine.

## WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Illicitly produced fentanyl can be in a liquid or powder form. It is also pressed into fake pills made to look like OxyContin®, Xanax®, Adderall®, and other pharmaceuticals.
- Rainbow fentanyl are fake pills made in a rainbow of colors.

## WHY IS FENTANYL SO DANGEROUS?

- Many people may be unaware that their drugs are laced with fentanyl.
- Six out of ten fake pills with fentanyl contain a potentially lethal dose.
- Drug traffickers use social media to advertise drugs/pills and conduct sales.
- It is VERY accessible to our kids.

## WHAT TO DO?

- Talk to your child about the dangers of fentanyl, and fake pills. Let them know to only take medicine prescribed by their doctor. (Even taking a pill from a friend is risky- because their friend may not know the true source.)
- Learn more about fentanyl and emoji codes used on social media, at [www.dea.gov/onepill](http://www.dea.gov/onepill).



# BEYOND PREVENTION

Sometimes it's too late for prevention. If you suspect your child may be using drugs, now is the time to step boldly into your role as parent and take immediate action. Don't wait. Don't rationalize. Substance use is not a rite of passage. It is a step toward a life-long addiction. Consult with a qualified medical or mental health professional to get your child drug tested and assessed.

## **A COMPREHENSIVE SUBSTANCE ABUSE EVALUATION:**

- determines if your child has a drug or alcohol addiction
- assesses the extent or level of addiction
- determines if there are any co-occurring conditions, including any physical or mental health concerns, as well as polydrug use
- assesses how substance use is affecting their life
- allows the treatment team to establish a baseline and build a treatment plan for your child's needs and recovery

## **CO-DEPENDENCY**

Co-dependency, in the context of substance use, is where one person is abusing the substance, and he or she depends on the other person to supply money, food, or shelter. According to Mental Health America, codependency is often referred to as "relationship addiction", in that codependent people tend to form and become dependent on unhealthy, emotionally harmful relationships.

## **DETOX**

Short for "detoxification," it is the medical process focused on treating the physical effects of withdrawal from substance use and comfortably achieving metabolic stabilization. Detoxification alone is not a treatment for substance use disorders, but often the first step in a drug treatment program.

## NALOXONE

Naloxone is a medication, approved by the FDA, designed to rapidly reverse an opioid overdose. It can very quickly restore normal respiration to a person whose breathing has slowed or stopped because of overdosing with heroin or prescription opioid pain medications. Naloxone is a temporary treatment as its effects do not last long. Because of this, it is vital to call for medical intervention ASAP after administering Naloxone.

## RECOVERY

The process of improved physical, psychological, and social well-being, and health after having suffered from a substance use disorder.

## RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

Residential program means a 24-hour live-in, seven-day-a-week substance abuse treatment program facility offering intensive rehabilitation services to individuals who are considered unable to live or work in the community due to social, emotional, or physical disabilities resulting from substance abuse.

## SOBER LIVING HOME

Sober living homes are group homes that are free of alcohol and drugs for individuals in recovery. Sober living homes are different than other residential programs, such as residential treatment centers, in that they are more loosely structured to facilitate employment and other outside obligations. Most homes require that you have already completed a treatment program and/or detox. For more information visit [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)





**CHAPTER 4**  
**EMOTIONAL &**  
**MENTAL HEALTH**

# ROLE

When it comes to our children’s mental health, our role as parents is to protect. Here are a few ways:

**Communication** – As parents, we are responsible for keeping the channels of communication open with our children. No one knows your child better than you. Be that safe person your child can confide in when they are struggling.

**Warning Signs** – Keep an eye out for the warning signs listed on the following pages. Remember that anxiety, if left untreated, can lead to depression and depression can lead to self-harm, eating disorders, and even suicide. The goal is to jump in as “parent” as early as possible and seek professional help sooner, rather than later. Also, during the middle and high school years, your child’s circle of friends and activities should be growing. Based on what you see and hear, is their world expanding or imploding?

# RIGHTS

**Seek Treatment** – As your child’s parent, you have the right to seek professional counseling, therapy, and treatment for your child.

## **A NOTE ABOUT PRIVACY RIGHTS (goodtherapy.org, 2019)**

In general, the right to privacy in treatment is connected to the right to consent to treatment. Because a child cannot legally consent to treatment, the parent often acts as a personal representative for the child. Most children do not have a legal right to privacy from their parents, as a parent may need certain information to consent to treatment. A parent generally has the right to request a child’s medical records. This may include a child’s diagnosis, symptoms, and treatment plan.

# RESPONSIBILITIES

- You are responsible for protecting your child from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.
- You are responsible for watching for early warning signs of emotional or mental trouble.
- You are responsible for securing or removing firearms and prescription medications in your home.
- You are responsible for modeling healthy coping skills.
- You are responsible for making sure your child is not left alone if they say they are thinking of committing suicide. Get professional help immediately. They are not just seeking attention.

# **ANXIETY**

## **WHAT IS ANXIETY? (APA, n.d.)**

An emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes such as increased blood pressure.

## **WHAT IS ANXIETY DISORDER?**

Anxiety disorder can interrupt daily activities like schoolwork, relationships, and job performance.

## **TEENS WITH ANXIETY DISORDERS:**

1. Have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns.
2. Avoid certain situations out of worry.
3. Experience physical symptoms like sweating, trembling, dizziness, or quickening of heartbeat.

## **RED FLAGS:**

- Depressed, angry, irritable (mood swings)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Stomachaches, headaches, migraines
- Change in sleep patterns, fatigue, nightmares
- Change in grades, missed assignments, feeling overwhelmed
- Change in eating habits
- Avoiding social situations

## **WHY IS ANXIETY INCREASING AMONG ADOLESCENTS?**

There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer to the increase in anxiety, however some possible contributing factors to consider are:

- Social Media / constant connection and comparison.
- High expectations and pressure to succeed.
- A world that feels scary and threatening.

## **WHAT CAN PARENTS/CAREGIVERS DO?**

- Pay attention to your child's feelings – be present and attentive.
- Remind them of their purpose.
- Validate concerns.
- Recall a time when they were afraid of something and met the challenge successfully.
- Encourage them to try what scares them instead of avoiding it.
- Reduce chaos at home (add structure, routines, boundaries, family meals, bedtimes).
- Help them eat healthier...less soda and junk food.
- Stay neutral and compassionate.
- Get professional help if anxiety continues to escalate.

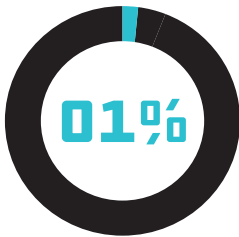
### COMMON PROBLEM AREAS FOR PARENTS:

- Unnecessarily rescuing and overprotecting
  - Making exceptions due to anxiety
  - Getting frustrated or even angry
  - Accepting avoidance instead of teaching skills
- (Source: Sharon Saline Webinar "When Worrying Takes Over: Helping Students Overcome Anxiety and Build Resiliency")

### TIPS FOR TEENS / WAYS TO EASE THEIR ANXIETY

- Deep breathing
- Get active
- Sleep well (ages 10-17 need 8.5 to 9.25 hours)
- Stay connected to others
- Avoid caffeine/energy drinks
- Identify healthy coping skills (exercise, music, journaling, drawing, walks, movies, etc.)

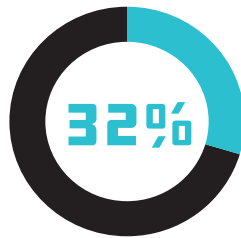
## ANXIETY BY THE NUMBERS



Many anxiety symptoms go ignored. Only **1%** of youth with anxiety seek treatment in the first year of symptoms.  
(Child Mind Institute , 2018)



Anxiety disorders are more prevalent in females.



Nearly **32%** of adolescents have an anxiety disorder.



Globally, the prevalence of youth experiencing clinically elevated anxiety symptoms —**ROUGHLY 1 IN 5**— nearly doubled during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the importance of mental health support and services for adolescents.

\*\* Child Mind Institute , 2018; Based on a study from the National Comorbidity Survey Adolescent Supplement

# DEPRESSION

The teenage years are hard, but they should not feel hopeless. If your child has been feeling sad for a few weeks or longer and are unable to concentrate on things they typically enjoy, then it's time to talk (and even seek professional help) about depression.

## **WHAT IS DEPRESSION?**

A mood disorder that causes distressing symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities such as sleeping, eating, or working. To be diagnosed with depression, symptoms must be present most of the day, nearly every day for at least two weeks. (NIMH, 2023)

The earlier a young person receives treatment for depression, the more effective the treatment can be.

## **THE GOOD NEWS:**

- A poll conducted on behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) finds that teens are open to talking about mental health but are uncomfortable starting the conversation. Parents need to take the lead in starting these conversations and mental health check ins!

Two-thirds of teens are open to talking about mental health, yet only 48% talk with their parents about the topic. (NAMI, 2022)

## **HELPING YOUR STRUGGLING TEEN**

- Find a trusted medical professional who can help.
- Find out what's happening and acknowledge their feelings.
- Listen carefully. Don't lecture.
- Don't push them to share. Be gentle, but persistent.
- Get them moving, and combat isolation.
- Help your child stay engaged throughout their day. Set a screentime limit.
- Teach relaxation exercises (like deep breathing).
- Encourage positive habits (eating and sleeping).
- Protect them from stressful surroundings.
- Create an environment of positivity at home.
- Reassure your child to come to you when they are upset.
- Spend quality time with them.

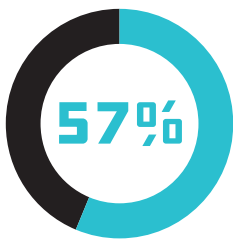
## **SIGNS & SYMPTOMS**

- Sadness or hopelessness
- Irritability, anger, or hostility
- Tearfulness or frequent crying
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Loss of interest in activities

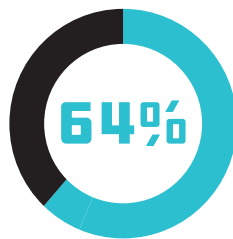
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Restlessness and agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Thoughts of death or suicide

### IS IT DEPRESSION OR TEENAGE GROWING PAINS?

- If you're unsure if your teen is depressed or just "being a teenager", consider how long the symptoms have been going on, how severe they are, and how different your teen is acting from their usual self.
- Hormones and stress can explain the occasional bout of teenage angst, but not continuous and unrelenting unhappiness, lethargy, or irritability.
- Learn the difference between "situational depression" and "clinical depression".
- Get professional help when your child no longer enjoys the activities and relationships they once enjoyed. Diagnosis and treatment of depression require the counsel of a trained mental health professional.



According to CDC data, nearly **57%** of teen girls felt persistently sad or hopeless in 2021. (This is double the number of boys who reported feeling the same.)



**64%** of teens surveyed felt the world is more stressful now than during their parents' teenage years. (NAMI, 2022)

# 2.9M

In 2020, **2.9 MILLION** U.S. adolescents (age 12-17) had at least 1 major depressive episode with severe impairment.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Do not delay seeking help. If you think your teen may be struggling with depression, it is important to seek the counsel of a trained mental health professional for diagnosis and treatment. Depression is a common mental illness and there are many treatment options that benefit most people.

# SUICIDE

## WARNING SIGNS: (NIH, 2022)

### Talking about:

- Wanting to die
- Great guilt or shame
- Being a burden to others

### Feeling:

- Empty, hopeless, trapped, or having no reason to live
- Extremely sad, more anxious, agitated, or full of rage
- Unbearable emotional or physical pain

### Changing behavior, such as:

- Making a plan, or researching ways to die
- Withdrawing from friends, saying goodbye, giving away important items, or making a will
- Taking dangerous risks such as driving extremely fast
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Eating or sleeping more or less
- Using drugs or alcohol more often

## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO PREVENT SUICIDE? (NASP, 2015)

Youth who are considering suicide may not seek help directly, but parents, teachers, and friends may recognize the warning signs. When these signs are noticed, the following actions should be taken.

- Remain calm.
- Ask the child directly if he or she is thinking about suicide (e.g., "Are you thinking of suicide?"). (CDC, 2021)
- Focus your concern on their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
- Listen.
- Reassure them that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
- Do not judge.
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the child alone.
- Remove means for self-harm.
- Get help. Seek help from a medical provider.

**2ND**

### LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH

Suicide is the **second leading** cause of death in the US for those ages 12 to 18. (CDC, 2021)

**3700**

In a typical day, there are an average of **3,700 suicide attempts** made by middle and high school students. (CDC, 2021)

**2X**

LGBTQ+ youth are **2x** more likely to have attempted suicide than their peers. (CDC, 2021)



## DON'T WAIT!

If you are worried about your child, Ask: "Are you thinking of attempting suicide?" or "Are you thinking of hurting yourself?"

If they ever indicate that they are, **DO NOT LEAVE THEM ALONE.** Get Professional help immediately.

Don't know what to say? Support them with language like, "I will always be here for you. I love you and there is no problem that we can't get through together."

Don't know where to go for help? **Text or Dial 988** for 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help!

# SELF HARM

## WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), self-harm occurs when a person hurts their own body on purpose.

A person who self-harms usually does not mean to kill themselves, but they are at a great risk of attempting and dying by suicide if they do not get help. (SAMHSA, 2023)

Tends to begin in preteen or early teen years. (Mayo Clinic, 2023)

Many people find that self-harm gives them a sense of relief and is used to cope with a problem. Some teens say that when they hurt themselves, they are trying to stop feeling negative feelings (like loneliness, anger, or hopelessness). Self-harm is typically not meant as a suicidal attempt, but it is associated with an elevated suicide risk. (Mayo Clinic, 2023)

## COMMON TRIGGERS FOR SELF-HARM AMONG TEENS (Ehmke, 2022)

- Feeling rejected (romantic interest, friend, or general feeling of being left out)
- Copy-cat behavior inspired by videos and images that show others cutting.

## RED FLAGS FOR CUTTING (Ehmke, 2022)

- Talking about self-injury
- Suspicious looking scars
- Wounds that don't heal or worsen
- Talking about feeling worthless or helpless
- Collecting sharp tools
- Wearing long sleeves, even in warm weather
- Emotional/behavioral instability

### Myths

- Teens grow out of self-harming behaviors, so there's no reason for treatment.
- Cutting is the only form of self-injury to worry about.
- Teens who self-harm are just seeking attention.
- If I ask my child about self-harm, they will be tempted to try it.

### Truth

- Teens with these behaviors need professional treatment.
- Other forms to be aware of include head banging, burns, hair pulling, excessive scratching, and other harmful behaviors.
- Teens may believe that self-harm will help them feel something, punish themselves, cope with stress or trauma, or to take control when life seems out of control.





# EATING DISORDERS

## WHAT ARE EATING DISORDERS?

- Serious but treatable mental and physical illnesses that affect people of all walks of life. (NEDA, n.d.)
- 28.8 million Americans will suffer from an eating disorder at some point in their lives. (NEDA, n.d.)
- 95% of those with eating disorders are between the ages of 12 and 25. (John Hopkins, n.d.)

## EATING DISORDERS INCLUDE:

- Anorexia Nervosa- abnormally low weight, fear of weight gain, distorted perception of weight
- Bulimia Nervosa- eating a large amount of food (binge eating), followed by purging
- Binge Eating Disorder- consume unusually large amounts of food and feel unable to stop eating.
- Orthorexia- obsession with proper or “healthful” eating
- Laxative Abuse – attempting to eliminate calories or lose weight by repeated use of laxatives.
- Compulsive Exercise – unhealthy relationship with exercise, excessive and rigid regimen
- and others. . .

## BODY IMAGE (NEDA, n.d.)

Those with a negative body image have a greater likelihood of developing an eating disorder. Body image is how you see yourself when you look in the mirror or when you picture yourself in your mind. It encompasses:

- What you believe about your own appearance.
- How you feel about your body, including your height, shape, and weight.
- How you sense and control your body as you move. How you physically experience or feel in your body.

## HOW TO HELP YOUR TEEN:

- Model and teach body positivity.
- Teach balance “all foods fit” / no food is “good” or “bad.”
- Do not talk about people and their body type.
- Teach your child about the unrealistic images of bodies in the media.
- Serve balanced meals in your home.
- Don’t comment on your child’s weight.
- Model healthy exercise in family activities.
- Get rid of your scale.
- If your child is showing signs of an eating disorder, talk to their doctor.



**CHAPTER 5**  
**RISKY**  
**BEHAVIORS**

## ROLE

When it comes to risky relationships, behaviors, and activities, our role as parents is to protect.

### HERE ARE A FEW WAYS:

**Brain development** – Remember your child’s brain is still developing, making them more prone to make impulsive, risky decisions. As a parent, it is our job to step in when their decisions are risky and may result in harmful consequences.

**Supervision** – Middle and high school aged children need lots of supervision. Your role as a parent is to “be present” as much as possible. Parental supervision should not be delegated to older siblings or outside caregivers on a regular basis. These are the years when you are needed most. There is no substitute for YOU.

## RIGHTS

- You have the right to work with school or community officials if your child is being bullied.
- You have the right to confiscate your child’s electronic devices if they are engaging in disreputable activities online.
- You have the right to call law enforcement when you suspect adults are providing drugs to minors.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

- You are responsible for the activities that take place in your home and on your property when hosting a sleepover or party.
- You are responsible for calling parents to confirm supervision when your child is invited to their home.
- You are responsible for stepping in and helping your child get out of an abusive dating relationship.

# **BULLYING**

## **WHAT IS BULLYING?**

Stopbullying.gov defines bullying as unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. This behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying includes actions like making threats, spreading rumors, physically or verbally attacking someone, and purposely excluding someone from a group. Most reported bullying happens in the school, but a good amount also happens on the playground, bus route, walking home, and on the internet.

Kids who are bullied, and the kids who do the bullying may have serious lasting problems. A 2019 survey from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that around 22% of students aged 12-18 experienced bullying. (NCES, 2019)

Results from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) show that, nationwide, 14% of LGB students reported not going to school because of safety concerns from bullying. (stopbullying.gov, 2021)

# **TYPES OF BULLYING**

## **Verbal**

- Teasing
- Name-calling
- Sexual comment
- Taunting
- Threatening to cause harm

## **Social**

- Leaving someone out
- Telling others not to be friends with someone
- Spreading rumors about someone
- Embarrassing someone in public

## **Physical**

- Hitting / kicking
- Tripping
- Pushing
- Taking or breaking someone's things
- Mean or rude hand gestures

## **Signs your child is being bullied**

- Unexplained injuries
- Lost or destroyed property
- Frequent headaches, and stomach aches (feeling sick or faking illness)
- Changes in eating habits
- Difficulty sleeping
- Declining grades
- Not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends
- Decreased self-esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors

## **Signs your child is the bully**

- Gets into physical or verbal fights
- Have friends who bully others
- Increasingly aggressive
- Sent to principal's office or receives detention frequently
- Unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blames others for their problems
- Doesn't accept responsibility for their actions
- Competitive and worries about popularity

**SAMPLE CONVERSATION STARTER:**

**Have you ever been bullied by someone?  
Have you witnessed someone being bullied?  
Have you ever embarrassed someone else  
on purpose?**

## **CYBERBULLYING**

**Stopbullying.gov** defines cyberbullying as bullying that takes place on devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. It can occur through SMS, text and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It also includes sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation (i.e. posting a mean, hurtful, or embarrassing photo or video of someone). Some cross the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.

**THE MOST COMMON PLACES FOR CYBERBULLYING:**

- Social Media such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok
- Text messaging and messaging apps
- Online chatting such as direct messaging, and instant messaging
- Online forums, chatrooms, and message boards (Reddit, Discord)
- Online gaming communities
- Email



### **WARNING SIGNS YOUR CHILD IS BEING CYBERBULLIED, OR CYBERBULLYING OTHERS:**

- Noticeable increase or decrease in device use, including texting.
- Child exhibits emotional responses (laughter, anger, upset) to what is happening on their device.
- Child hides their screen or device when others are near, and avoids discussion about what they are doing on their device.
- Social media accounts are shut down, or new ones appear.
- Child starts to avoid social situations, even those that were enjoyed in the past.
- Child becomes withdrawn or depressed.

### **TIPS FOR PARENTS**

- Teach your child that the only people who should have their usernames and passwords are their parents. Passwords are not to be shared with friends.
- Stay calm if your child tells you they are being cyberbullied. Ask them to show you what they have received. Be supportive. If there are threats of violence, call the police.
- Model positive, respectful digital behavior yourself.
- Review or re-set your child's phone location and privacy settings if needed
- Be aware of your child's online habits. Having passwords and being able to access their accounts is not an invasion of privacy, but a measure of safety.
- Have limits to the time your child spends on their devices.

### **TEACH YOUR TEEN OR PRETEEN THESE STEPS TO DEAL WITH A CYBERBULLY:**

#### **STOP**

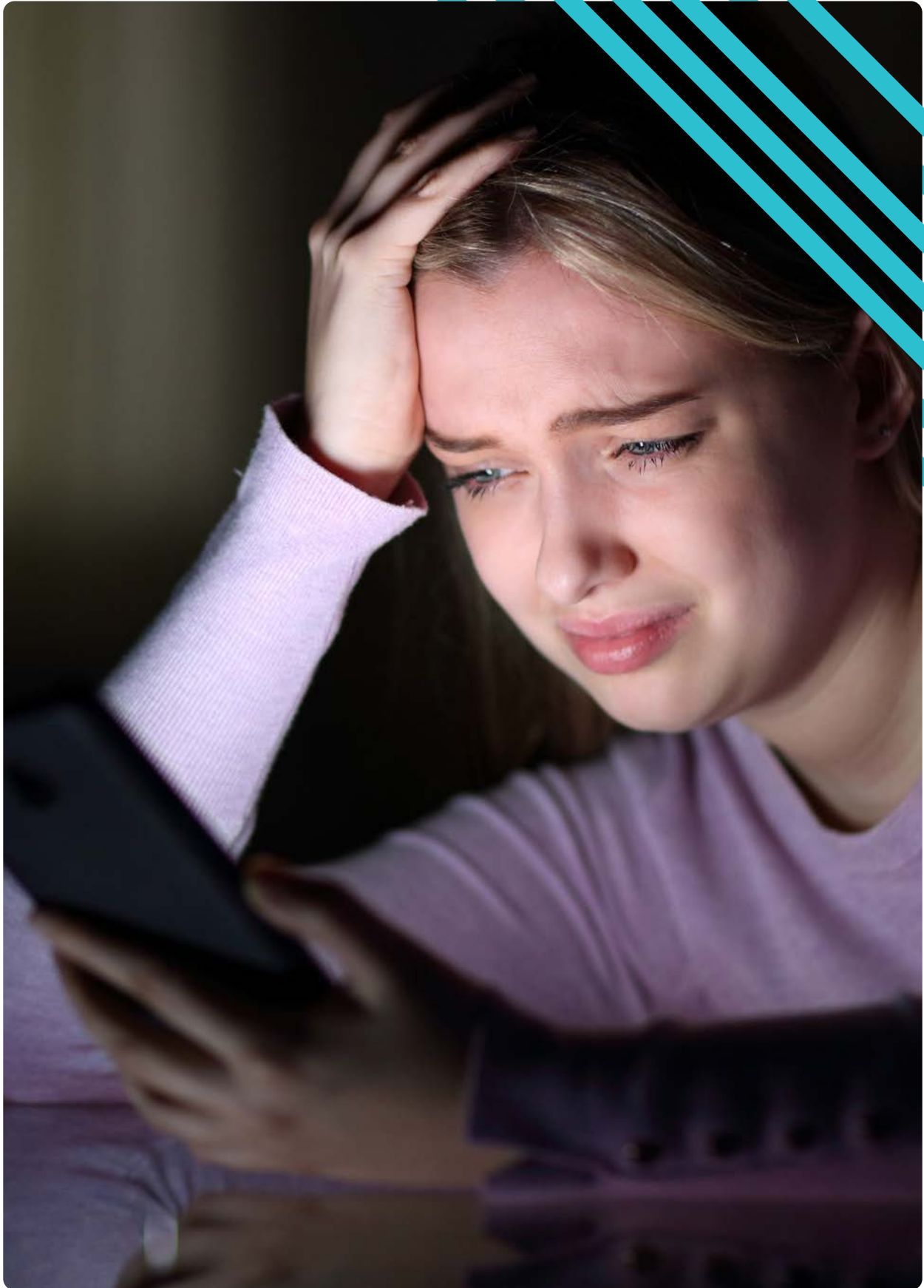
If you receive an offensive message, do not respond.

#### **BLOCK**

Block the cyberbully on all social media platforms and limit communication with friends about the incident.

#### **TELL**

Inform a trusted adult about what's happening. Do not erase or delete anything.



# DATING VIOLENCE

## WHAT IS DATING VIOLENCE?

Dating violence includes several abusive relationship behaviors like physical and sexual violence, psychological aggression, and stalking a current or past romantic partner. These behaviors can occur in person, or online. (DOJ, 2023)

### PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Hurting or attempting to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, or using another type of physical force

### SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Forcing or attempting to force a partner to take part in sexual activities/touching without consent. Includes sharing of sexual pictures without consent

### PSYCHOLOGICAL AGGRESSION

The use of verbal and non-verbal communication intending to harm a partner mentally or emotionally and gain control over them.

### STALKING

A pattern of repeated, unwanted attention and contact by a current or former partner that causes fear or concern for safety.

## HOW COMMON IS DATING VIOLENCE?

According to the CDC's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, of those who dated in the 12 months prior:

- 1 in 12 U.S. high school students experienced physical dating violence.
- 1 in 12 U.S. high school students experienced sexual dating violence

## PARENTS CAN LOOK FOR THE FOLLOWING WARNING SIGNS:

(DOJ, 2023)

- Telling a partner who they can or cannot hang out with or contact
- Looking through a partner's phone without permission
- Inconsistent school attendance
- Sudden request to change a class schedule or lunch hour
- Constantly worrying about making a partner upset
- Joking about a partner's violent behavior or bad temper

If your child is in a dating relationship, let them know that they can talk to you about it. Starting the conversation may seem uncomfortable but can keep them safe!

# PARTIES & SLEEPOVERS

Whether you're hosting a teen or tween party, or dropping your child off at a party, it's important to set specific boundaries.

## WHEN YOUR CHILD IS INVITED TO A PARTY/SLEEPOVER

([healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org), 2010)

- Know the details about where your child is going (who, what, when, where).
  - Have your child call you if anything changes (location, attendees, or presence of substances, etc.)
- Call the parent(s) hosting the party/sleepover to make sure they're aware of the plan and will be there the entire time.
  - This is the time to ask about the presence of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco.
  - For a sleepover meet with the parents of the friend they want to spend the night with.
- Talk to your teen to make them feel prepared with an answer if there is alcohol at the party.
  - Practice refusal skills so they feel confident saying "no".
  - Have an escape plan or code with you to come get them.
- Make sure your teen understands they can call you at ANY TIME for a ride home. Remind them to NEVER ride with a driver who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Be up to greet your teen when they get home.
- If your teen is staying the night with a friend, check on this plan with the friend's parents and discuss curfew together.

When Hosting a Party/Sleepover, remember that you could be held liable for illegal substance use, and other trouble that occurs on your property under your supervision.

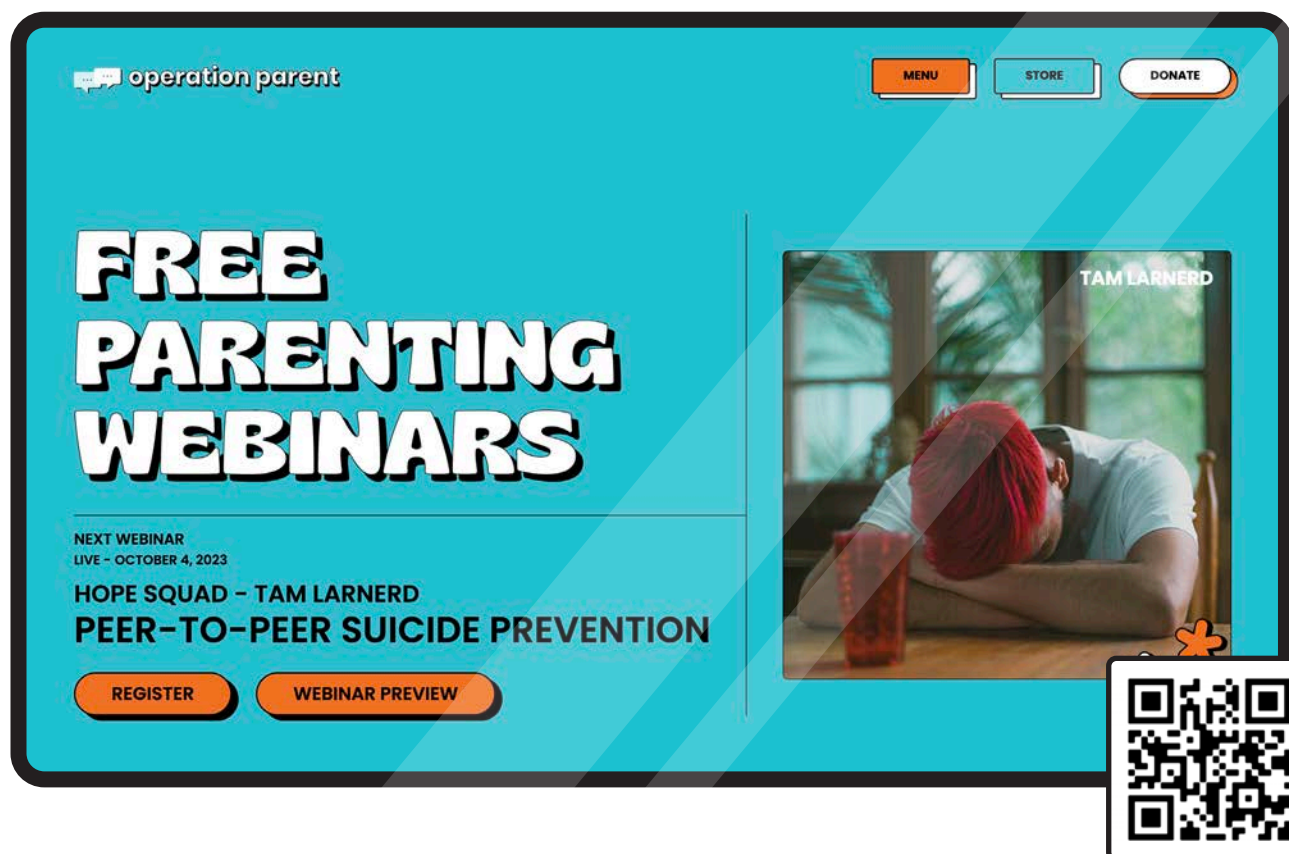
## THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE HOSTING ([healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org), 2010)

- Remind your teen that there will be no drinking, drugs, vaping, etc.
- Make sure to lock up or remove medications, alcohol, and firearms.
- Limit the number of friends who can be invited.
- Consider/ask to check backpacks as they arrive.
- Supervise as needed, with occasional walkthroughs.

### PARENT NETWORKING

Connect with the parents of your child's friends. Get to know and trust each other and look out for your teens as a team. Communication between families not only helps with peace of mind but can serve as a deterrent for teen risky behavior.

# TO KEEP LEARNING, CHECK OUT ALL OUR ONLINE RESOURCES!



The screenshot shows the 'operation parent' website header with 'MENU', 'STORE', and 'DONATE' buttons. The main content area features the text 'FREE PARENTING WEBINARS' in large, bold, white letters. Below this, it says 'NEXT WEBINAR LIVE - OCTOBER 4, 2023' and 'HOPE SQUAD - TAM LARNERD PEER-TO-PEER SUICIDE PREVENTION'. There are two buttons: 'REGISTER' and 'WEBINAR PREVIEW'. To the right is a video thumbnail of Tam Larnerd with his head on a table, and a QR code in the bottom right corner.

operation parent

MENU STORE DONATE


## FREE PARENTING WEBINARS

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LIVE - OCTOBER 4, 2023

HOPE SQUAD - TAM LARNERD  
PEER-TO-PEER SUICIDE PREVENTION

REGISTER WEBINAR PREVIEW

TAM LARNERD



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webinars on  
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[operationparent.org](https://operationparent.org)

- Parent Handbooks
- Webinars
- Resource Library
- Social Media
- Prevention Program



**WAS THIS HANDBOOK  
HELPFUL?**

PLEASE TAKE 1 MINUTE TO GIVE  
US INVALUABLE FEEDBACK!

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