

Understanding Childhood Trauma and Traumatic Stress

“There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds.” — Laurell K. Hamilton, *Mistral's Kiss*.

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, an initiative of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), two thirds of children under the age of 16 have experienced at least one traumatic event. Untreated traumatic stress in childhood can impact not only the child’s development, but also their health and well-being in adulthood.

Trauma can be experienced as a single event or can persist over periods of time. When a traumatic event occurs, there is a perceived threat to one’s safety. One is likely to feel frightened, helpless or feel that their life is in danger. Witnessing an event that threatens the life or well being of a loved one can also be traumatic, especially for children who rely on that person for security. Not only can traumatic experiences cause strong emotional responses, but they can also trigger physiological reactions. These reactions may include heart pounding, increased blood pressure, upset stomach or even vomiting or loss of bladder control. This physiological reaction is called the “flight or fight” response, which is the body’s way of preparing us to respond to stimuli in the environment. The flight or fight response is something we all experience at one time or another. A traumatic experience, however, is an extremely stressful situation that the person does not have the tools to bounce back from easily. Two people can experience the same event, but respond very differently. An event that is traumatic for one person, may not be for another.



Examples of potentially traumatic events include:

- Physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Parental substance abuse
- Refugee and war experiences
- Loss related to natural disasters
- Accidents – like car accidents or a plane crash
- Bullying

A child that has experienced multiple traumatic events may develop traumatic stress that can impact their future behavior and well-being. They may struggle with emotional regulation and have symptoms of anxiety and depression. In addition, they may have difficulty forming attachments and developing relationships. It may be difficult for them to focus in school and to reach their academic potential. Children with traumatic stress may have nightmares, struggle to eat or have ongoing physical symptoms, like headaches. They are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors like substance abuse and sexual promiscuity and are at an increased risk of being involved in the juvenile justice system. Without treatment, children with traumatic stress can develop life-long health issues, like heart disease and diabetes (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network).

There are a variety of factors that impact how a child responds to a potentially traumatic event. Genetics and cultural factors can be a risk or protective factor for a child. For example, racism can potentially cause traumatic stress. A child who previously experienced a traumatic event is at a greater risk for traumatic stress. The way care givers respond to the needs of the child during a traumatic event can influence the response of the child. The proximity of the event is another factor. A child may experience trauma by viewing images of a school shooting on TV or by talking to a loved one who experienced the event first hand. There is little that can be done to prevent a traumatic event from occurring, but there are ways to help children recover.

One way to help a child with traumatic stress is to create a space that makes them feel safe and reassure them that they are safe. Teachers may reduce noise in the classroom by using a calming chime to get the attention of the class instead of clapping or shouting. Being up front and honest about event details and taking the child's concerns seriously can help the child cope with the traumatic event. Help the child understand that they are not responsible for the traumatic event that they experienced. Encourage parents to seek professional help for the child. A therapist can help the child process their feelings and develop healthy coping strategies. Family therapy may also be beneficial for parents to understand their child's needs and practice coping strategies at home.

References:

https://www.ecmhc.org/tutorials/trauma/mod2_4.html

<https://www.nctsn.org/>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma>

Red Ribbon Week

Did you know that **Red Ribbon Week** started in California in honor and remembrance of a DEA undercover narcotics officer who was tortured and murdered in the line of duty in 1985? This tragic happening would become the catalyst in a call for action in communities around the country for drug awareness and prevention.

Soon after, in 1988, the National Family Partnership (NFP) would launch the first nationally held **Red Ribbon Week** campaign that spanned all across the nation. NFP's national **Red Ribbon Week** has been going strong for over 30 years.

Red Ribbon Week encourages and allows communities and individuals to collectively take a stand in protecting the hopes and dreams of our children through a commitment to drug prevention and education and a personal commitment to live drug free lives.

Each year, the NFP holds a contest that individuals, schools and communities can enter to help determine what the national **Red Ribbon Week's** theme will be. There were thousands of Red Ribbon theme ideas submitted by students, parents, school personnel and communities all across the country for the 2019 **Red Ribbon Week**. The winning theme for 2019 National Red Ribbon Week is: **Send a Message. Stay Drug Free!** A student from a middle school in Griswold, CT, designed the winning theme pictured below.

Schools can choose to center their Red Ribbon Week around the national theme or they can simply choose to develop their own themes for **Red Ribbon Week**. Some schools hold their own contests among staff and students that has helped build enthusiasm for the week-long event.

Some schools and communities use the week as a launching pad for a cause or project they feel is important in helping and supporting a healthy school and community environment.



As we know, there are a multitude of reasons and circumstances that may lead someone down the path of drug use and addiction. Poverty, boredom, bullying, grief, depression, other mental health concerns are only just a few.

Here are some examples of what schools and communities can do to help take a more active role in drug prevention efforts:

- Hold a Food and/or Clothing Drive. Go a step further and write a positive note or message on each donated item.
- Volunteer to clean up a park or a neighborhood/community center. Go a step further and raise money to purchase new equipment and games to be used at these parks and centers.
- Host a weekly game night at your school or community center at no cost to families. Go a step further and raise money to pay for food, prizes and giveaways each week.
- Start and/or enhance a mentoring program in your school or community. Go a step further and hold a ceremony recognizing the accomplishments of the mentors and mentees.
- Start a Mentoring Program in your school or community

Red Week Contest information:

Enter the 2020 Red Ribbon Theme Contest today for a chance to win \$500 in Red Ribbon Themed Merchandise in 2020. <https://redribbon.org/enter/>

2019 Red Ribbon Photo Contest

The entry period for the 2019 Red Ribbon Photo Contest is October 1st through November 1st.

Win An iPad & \$1,000 For Your School

Two ways to enter:

1. Families may submit a photo of a home decoration.
2. Schools may submit a photo of a school decoration.

Snap A Photo & Upload

Take a picture of your Red Ribbon decoration (preferably with people in it!) and upload to www.redribbon.org. You must be 18 years old to enter, so parents (or for school entries, school staff or PTA members) must submit the photos.

<https://redribbon.org/contest/>

Youth Vaping: Protecting our Youth

E-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among U.S. youth (CDC). According to a national survey by the CDC, 3.6 million teens reported current e-cigarette use in 2018. This is more than double the number of middle and high school students who reported using e-cigarettes in 2017 (1.5 million in 2017). In an effort to highlight this growing health concern, the Surgeon General released an advisory on e-cigarette use among youth in December 2018. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services media release, the advisory “stresses the importance of protecting children from a lifetime of nicotine addiction and associated health risks by immediately addressing the epidemic of youth e-cigarette use”.

Parents, schools and health professionals play a critical role in addressing the dangers of youth e-cigarette use by engaging in conversations with youth to promote education and awareness. Below are important talking points that should be included in these conversations:

What is an e-cigarette?

- E-cigarettes are battery-powered devices that deliver nicotine, flavorings, and other substances. They work by heating a liquid to produce an aerosol that users inhale into their lungs. The use of e-cigarettes is often referred to as vaping. It may also be referenced as “Juuling”, a term coined from the e-cigarette brand Juul.
- The Juul is one of the more popular e-cigarette devices used by teens. It is shaped like a USB drive and uses nicotine liquid cartridges called pods. A single JUUL pod can contain as much nicotine as a pack of 20 regular cigarettes.

What are the health risks of using e-cigarettes?

- E-cigarettes are not just harmless water vapor. Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine which is highly addictive and damaging to the developing adolescent brain. Use of nicotine under the age of 25 can harm the parts of the brain responsible for memory, attention and learning. Even when the liquid used in e-cigarettes doesn’t contain nicotine, it still contains other harmful ingredients like heavy metals, flavoring that can be linked to lung disease, ultrafine particles and cancer-causing chemicals that can be inhaled deep into the lungs.
- Vaping can lead to mouth and throat irritation, worsening asthma, chest pain, nausea/upset stomach and nicotine addiction.
- Studies are showing that youth who begin using e-cigarettes as teenagers are more likely to take up smoking than those who don’t use e-cigarettes.

Aside from the use of e-cigarettes to vape nicotine and other flavorings, there has also been an increasing trend amongst youth to use e-cigarette vaporizers for other substances including liquid THC (the main psychoactive substance found in marijuana) and marijuana wax. Because of the highly concentrated levels of THC in both the liquid and wax form of marijuana, the substances produce a more powerful and dangerous high. While a marijuana cigarette can contain up to 18% THC, the liquid or wax form can contain up to 80% THC. This higher potency

high can leave damaging effects on teen brain development and can increase the likelihood of addiction. Aside from the health risks, vaping marijuana can be easier for teens to hide. Vaping THC does not produce the characteristic smell that results when marijuana is smoked through a joint or pipe and most e-cigarettes can be concealed in the palm of the hand.

Education and awareness surrounding the latest teen trends in youth e-cigarette use is an important step in prevention and intervention. SCIP is partnering with Lincoln Public Schools, Bryan Independence Center and Region V Systems in an effort to provide a community awareness event surrounding the use of e-cigarettes. Please join us on October 24 to learn more. For educators, families and community members who are not in the Lincoln/Lancaster County area, this event will be recorded and uploaded to our SCIP website at www.scipnebraska.com within a couple of weeks of the event. LPS will also be providing this event live via Facebook.

October 24, 2019- Let's Talk: Youth Vaping & Marijuana Use
Lincoln Southeast High School (Commons Area)
6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Rebekah Willoughby, a Public Health Educator with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department and Deputy Jeremy Schwarz, a Licensed Drug Recognition Expert with the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office, will discuss:

- The prevalence of youth vaping and marijuana use
- The effects of these substances on the developing youth brain
- Physical health effects of vaping and marijuana use and signs of use
- The role of marketing in vaping and various products that youth are using
- Legal aspects
- How to engage in conversations with youth about vaping and marijuana
- Resources to further address prevention and early intervention of use

Please contact Abbe Edgecombe, SCIP Coordinator for Lincoln-Lancaster County, for questions or additional information: (402) 327-6841 or aedgecombe@lmep.com

References: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS); National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); Tobacco Free Lancaster County