

...THIS FOR  
TOO LONG  
**LET'S** NOT  
WAIT TO  
**TALK.** WE  
HAVE BEEN  
AVOIDING...

A TOOLKIT FOR NAVIGATING TEEN  
SUBSTANCE USE IN THE TRI-COUNTY REGION:  
MONTEREY, SAN BENITO, SANTA CRUZ  
2022

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## GROWING UP IN THE TRI-COUNTY REGION

According to the data, teens growing up in Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties have easy access and opportunity to use drugs and alcohol. This is a reality. But as parents and caregivers, we can help them navigate through these tough decisions. Where can we start? Know the facts, communicate openly, and listen to our teens. Keep reading to learn more.



**34%**

**OF TRI-COUNTY 11TH GRADERS** report feelings of sadness and hopelessness that interfere in their usual activities

**BETWEEN 2017 AND 2021** the number of drug related deaths in the Tri-County area increased by

**74%**

**29%**

**OF TRI-COUNTY 11TH GRADERS** report using substances in the past month

# DEAR READER,

**THIS PARENTING THING IS HARD. BY PARENTING, WE MEAN ANYONE WHO IS CARING FOR A YOUNG PERSON. YOU MAY INDEED BE A PARENT, OR YOU MAY BE A GRANDPARENT, A FOSTER PARENT, A STEP-PARENT, A CONCERNED NEIGHBOR OR A COMMUNITY LEADER. WHATEVER YOUR TITLE, YOU ARE A CARETAKER, AND SO THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU.**

You signed on to parenting knowing it would be hard, but maybe not knowing that the further along you went and the more complex that your little human being became, the fewer roadmaps there would be. Here in the Tri-County region that spans Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito Counties, substance use, including alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, looms large as a significant challenge for youth and families trying to navigate the teen years. Whether you call your home the ocean, the redwoods, the mountains or farmland, it's time to acknowledge that this is an issue that our teens are grappling with, and they need our help.

There is no magic bullet to address teen substance use. As much as we'd like to hand over a roadmap with all the right answers, our counties and our families are far too diverse in their experiences, their values, their relationships and their preferences to have any precise blueprint. We also know that parents are just one part of the equation. It takes a village, a true community effort to shape a healthier environment and to reshape community norms so that all teens can thrive. We do not have a step-by-step guide with the promise of fail-proof success. Because no part of parenting ever does.

But here's what we do have: We have creative, energetic, resilient kids who are working hard at the task of figuring out who they are and who they want to be in this world. We have solid research on how to help teens navigate the complexities of adolescence and substance use. We have best practices that can be adjusted to meet the needs of individual families, and networks of neighbors and friends. And we have our own intuitive wisdom as parents and caregivers, our own knowledge of our children in all of their uniqueness, and our unswerving love for and dedication to our kids. "Let's Talk" is a toolkit for parents, centered around the idea that with a lot of solid science, and a lot of heart, we can support our teens as they navigate the tough stuff.

**SO LET'S START THE TALK.**

# What's Happening To Your Teen?

## What Were You Thinking? The Teen Brain

Sometimes it may seem to parents that their teens aren't thinking at all. The truth is that they aren't always thinking in quite the same way that you are, because their brains aren't working in the same way yet. It's complex, but here are the main points that parents should know about the opportunities and risks.

### Development

The teen brain isn't a fully developed brain, and it won't be until about age 25.

**Opportunity:** This phase is sometimes referred to as a "window of opportunity" in which teens can learn fast, consolidate information, connect emotionally to others, and define themselves on the way to independent adulthood.

**Risk:** Sometimes, teens really aren't thinking, or at least not in the way you want them to. On their road to independence, some of evolution's tricks that set teens up for opportunity also carry risks. The consequences of those risks may be greater for teens than for adults because that brain of theirs is still taking shape.

### Learning

The teen brain is going through a period of rapid development where it can learn and expand at an impressive rate.

**Opportunity:** This is why teens can pick up on new skills quickly, fix your computer, or latch onto a new hobby.

**Risk:** All of this impressive learning means that the brain hooks onto ideas fast and hard, and that includes substance use. The teen brain actually reads addiction as a form of learning, and so it "learns" substances faster than the adult brain.

### "Use it or Lose it"

The teen brain builds up the skills and knowledge being used, and it cuts away what isn't being used.

**Opportunity:** This allows it to be the most efficient in excelling at what is important.

**Risk:** If a teen is "using" the part of the brain that is addicted to substances, and doing so at the cost of using other parts of the brain (like the parts that read books or do mathematics or interact with peers or play sports), then the brain is shaping around the using of substances first and foremost. As a result, it is essentially "losing" these other forms of learning.

### Relying on What Works

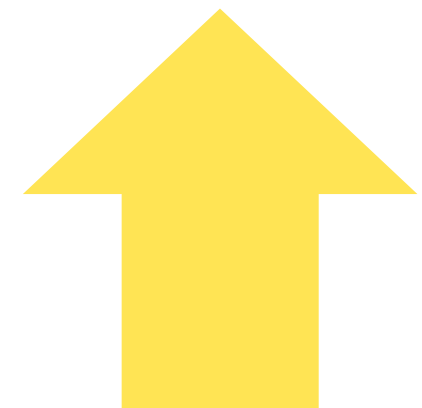
The part of the brain that isn't developed yet is the part that controls self-regulation, reasoning, decision-making and planning. It's the part that controls our understanding of risk and consequence. So teens often have to rely on the part of the brain that is fully complete, and that's the part that is associated with impulse, emotion, and immediate reactions such as fear and aggression. Sound familiar?

**Opportunity:** Some brain scientists suggest that because teens act with feeling more than thinking, this emotional rollercoaster actually may help them connect more to other people and develop empathy. Emotion may also help them learn more efficiently and develop stronger memories, encouraging teens to steer clear of experiences that have produced negative emotions, and move towards experiences that have produced positive emotions.

**Risk:** Especially when we're talking about substance use, the skills that aren't fully developed—decision making for example—are pretty important. We also know that substances activate pleasure centers of the brain, and so the brain reads these as positive emotions to be repeated.

**TEENS CAN BE SO MUCH FUN, WITH THEIR EXUBERANCE, CREATIVITY, AND CRITICAL THINKING. BUT THERE'S A DOWNSIDE IN THAT THEY ARE HARDWIRED FOR RISK.**

Laurie Dubin, Parent and Founder, Be the Influence



### The Teen Brain Loves a Thrill

Risk-taking and teenagers are best friends.

**Opportunity:** Teens are busy learning about the world and the roles and responsibilities needed to become an adult. What if our four-year old never tried to climb the jungle gym on their own? What if our teenager didn't confront a fear of public speaking so that they could give that class presentation? Risk taking can be a way to learn, grow, and move onto new stages of development.

**Risk:** Substance use is not a jungle gym or a class presentation. Substance use carries far more severe risks. The part of the brain that loves the thrill is also reading that thrill as a reward. And we all want more rewards. This is the path to addiction.

### The Good News

Just because the teen brain can sometimes feel like it's working up the perfect storm, there are opportunities here. Just because their brain isn't destined for completion until their mid-20's does not mean that you can't help your teen get a head start! Parents and caretakers are essential because we are the voice that can help our kid think ahead, learn to regulate emotions, and plan for decisions. It's important for us to know what's happening (or not happening) in those brains, but that doesn't mean that we can't do anything about it. We have to understand our kids and what equipment they're working with, but we can still hold them accountable for unhealthy decisions and behaviors. It just means that parents have to help them get there.

**WE'RE CONSTANTLY COMPARING OURSELVES AGAINST SOCIAL MEDIA, OUR PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS, AND OUR OWN GOALS. IT'S HARD TO RELAX OR PROCESS EVERYTHING. FOR A LOT OF US IT'S EASIER TO SIMPLY ESCAPE WITH DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.**

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

## Risk and Protection

While the teen brain is doing exactly what it is supposed to do, there are many other factors impacting our kids and their development. Some of these influences put young people at risk for substance use, and other influences help protect them from substance use. Importantly, no one factor means that a teen will or will not use substances. Risk factors are an increase in risk, but risk can be balanced out by protection and resilience. Let's take a look at just some of these influences.

### A HANDFUL OF RISK FACTORS

- Mental health issues
- ADHD
- Trauma
- Bullying
- Friends that use
- Accessibility of substances
- Family rejection of LGBTQ+ identity
- Experiences or perceptions of racial discrimination
- Family substance misuse
- Community attitudes and norms
- Early use of substances
- Genetic predisposition

### A HANDFUL OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Parental monitoring
- Positive self-image
- Parental involvement
- Community and school norms and behavioral expectations
- Positive coping and self-regulation skills
- Positive and healthy peer relationships
- School and community connectedness

Most often, the real lives of teens are a combination of protection and risk. Sometimes substance use and addiction even emerge where we have a hard time seeing the risk factors. Other times it is more obvious. Using the reflections from an anonymous teen, we get a window into this complexity. Notice the protective and positive influences in this scenario, right alongside risk factors and escalating use. It's important to remember that everyone carries risk factors. We can't prevent adversity in life, or the circumstances we were born into. But we can build the protective factors that help us and our children face and emerge from challenges and risks.

**ANONYMOUS TEEN'S EXPERIENCE:**

*I was only in 7th grade the first time I tried something. My older brother had taken me to a party and I was sitting alone on the couch, so when some kids started talking to me and offered me a vape I took it. I didn't even know what I was taking. I had seen my brother high before and I was curious. I think they thought it was funny. I was a typical "good kid". I got good grades. I liked my teachers too, like real connections where I felt like they wanted the best for me. And I was close with my mom. She spent time with us when she could but she had to work a lot and I felt lonely sometimes. I had some friends but no best friends, not the kind where you have dinner at their house or anything. I didn't think I'd like getting high—I knew it wasn't good for me. But I ended up really liking how it made me feel. It was fun and I felt relaxed and happy. And that's where it started I guess, then I wanted to do it again. From there it surprised me how easy it was. It was easy to get at parties or from my brother and his friends.*

**TRY THESE WAYS TO BOOST PROTECTION FOR YOUR TEEN:**

- Ensure there are other adults that you both trust who your teen can turn to for help
- Help your teen identify and foster their interests and hobbies
- Support your teen in getting involved in structured activities
- Build communication with your teen before you have to talk about tricky issues
- Spend meaningful and focused time with your teen
- Let your teen know that you love and accept them regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Help your teen to build up positive coping skills by role modeling, talking, and exploring what helps them face challenges in a healthy way
- Promote positive mental health in your language and actions, always leaving the door open for getting help if needed

THE COMPLEXITY OF RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

RISK FACTORS

**I WAS ONLY IN 7TH GRADE . . . SOME KIDS STARTED TALKING TO ME AND OFFERED ME A VAPE . . . I HAD SEEN MY BROTHER HIGH BEFORE . . .**

**MY TEACHERS . . . I FELT LIKE THEY WANTED THE BEST FOR ME . . . I WAS CLOSE WITH MY MOM. SHE SPENT TIME WITH US WHEN SHE COULD . . .**

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

# The Load They Carry: Mental Health

## Our Teens Are Dealing With A Lot

A lot of what they're dealing with is what we all had to deal with as teens. Social pressure, academic expectations, trying on new identities, what to wear to the school dance, navigating choices around drugs and sex, and all of the other BIG decisions of adolescence. Take a moment and think back to that time. What did you worry about? What missteps did you make? Would you have done anything differently? We've all been there. Your teen is there now too.

### But Wait...

There are a few more issues that they're facing that we didn't have to deal with. They are a generation exposed to unfathomable amounts of unfiltered information that can be solemn and disturbing. They have active shooter drills in school. Their already sensitive self-images are now measured against social media's influencers. Inequities and the gap between have and have not is far wider than it was a generation ago. Substances are more toxic than ever, with higher levels of THC in cannabis, higher levels of nicotine in vape products, and fentanyl lacing causing the overdoses of their peers. They have come of age in the shadow of a pandemic, a global crisis that will define their generation.

**IN 7TH GRADE I WAS THREATENED BY OTHER GUYS, FROM NAME CALLING TO GETTING JUMPED IN THE LOCKER ROOM. THIS LED TO DEPRESSION, THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE, A LOT OF DRUG USE, AND JOINING A GANG. I DIDN'T WANT TO FEEL ANYMORE SO I TOOK A LOT OF DRUGS.**

SAN BENITO TEEN

So while as parents and grandparents and caretakers, we do remember what it's like to be a teen, and a lot of that still holds true, there is also a whole new world of pressures, anxieties, and complexities that our teens are dealing with now.

## What Is Mental Health?

When we talk about mental health, we mean the experience and impact of hardships on our lives, and the capacity of individuals to cope and thrive. We also know that some of our young people are experiencing persistent and longstanding mental health challenges that may be diagnosed by a professional. Our mental health, and that of our teens, is constantly impacted by internal and external forces that can lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness or loneliness. Many of these emotions are quite normal, and we suspect there is not a single reader among us who has not experienced some of these feelings, particularly during this pandemic era. But when left unchecked and unsupported, these feelings can lead to severe consequences, including substance misuse and addiction, self-harm and even suicide.

## What Impacts Teen Mental Health?

The root causes of these emotions are varied. They may be an "achievement culture" where teens may feel both personal ambition and the weight of others' expectations. They may have experiences of intense trauma among our teens who have crossed borders to secure a safer life. They may be tied to social media. It may be that the increased access to information leads to young people carrying the world's worries on their shoulders before they're ready.

### THESE ARE JUST A HANDFUL OF THE EXPERIENCES THAT CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT OUR TEENS' MENTAL HEALTH:

- Family dynamics
- Peer and romantic relationships
- Social media
- Traumatic experiences
- Experiences of discrimination
- Living in poverty
- Pressure to achieve
- Underlying psychiatric disorders and brain chemistry
- World events that threaten feelings of safety and security
- Learning differences that are not addressed

### The Connection Between Mental Health and Substance Use

Whatever the underlying cause of hardship, we know this as fact: mental health challenges are one of the clearest pathways to substance use. When our social and emotional health is suffering and we don't have adequate resources to cope, substance use initially can make an easy and effective coping strategy.

Let's look at a handful of key points about this connection.

**The relationship between mental health and substance use goes in both directions.** Teens who struggle with mental health challenges are more likely to use substances. In turn, teens who use substances may be more likely to experience mental health challenges in the future.

**Substances are an extremely convincing coping mechanism for mental health challenges, at first.** Depending on the substance, they can generate feelings of relaxation and calm, happiness, and even connectedness to a greater power. But the more our bodies grow accustomed to substances, the more substance we need to get the same feeling. And long-term consequences can in fact cause depression, loss of motivation, anxiety and paranoia.

**Teens may set out to simply experiment,** but then discover the impact that substances have to decrease stress and anxiety. This can lead to frequent use.

#### But Wait!

Risk is only half of the story, because a person's mental health can also be one of the most powerful protective factors against substance use. People with "good" mental health don't necessarily lead lives free from stressors but they generally have greater access to healthy ways of coping. These are a handful of the characteristics that shape resilience, which means our ability to bounce back after hardship.

### A HANDFUL OF EXPERIENCES THAT SHAPE RESILIENCE

- Coping skills taught in school or in the home
- Communication
- Adult supports
- School connectedness
- Opportunities to participate in meaningful endeavors
- Acceptance and inclusion
- Positive peer networks

## What We Can Do

### Build the Relationship

Your relationship with your teen is the best protective foundation you can lay. Practice positive ways of communicating, listening without judging, and role modeling healthy coping and relating. If this feels like a lot (cause it is!) and you are wondering where to start on this, check out our Spotlight on Empathy on page 12 and lean into the many online resources.

### Destigmatize Mental Health

We all have different ways of thinking about mental health, shaped by our own experiences, values and cultures. We may be nervous or even afraid about what it means to share our hardships or to seek support. But the research is clear on this: Teens who are struggling need support to avoid negative and even dire consequences, and stigma is a major roadblock to getting that support. Destigmatizing mental health means talking about it openly, encouraging each other to ask for support, and validating our teens' feelings.

### Identify Kids Who Are Struggling

Teens are going through normal developmental changes, so closed doors and mood swings may be the norm these days. But you know your kids, so when something seems not right, it's probably not right. Signs that your teen is struggling might include: low energy levels, abnormal fatigue, frequent anxiety, trouble sleeping, problem focusing or with memory, unexplained changes in appetite, excessive worry, prolonged feelings of sadness or anger, avoidance of friends, inability to carry out daily tasks, and more. Importantly, there are not always clear signs that our kids are struggling. This is why it is so important to make mental health a normal part of our family conversations. For example: "I imagine that it might be hard these days. We are all struggling in some ways. How is your level of stress and anxiety lately?"

### Get Help

Mental Health support can come in the form of counseling at school or from bolstering protective factors like engagement in meaningful activities. If you sense that your teen would benefit from counseling, you can reach out to your school and/or healthcare provider to find the right care.

**27%** OF 9TH GRADERS ACROSS THE TRI-COUNTY REGION SAY THAT THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED CHRONIC FEELINGS OF SADNESS AND HOPELESSNESS. BY 11TH GRADE THAT NUMBER JUMPS TO

**34%**

# SPOTLIGHT ON EMPATHY

**WHAT IS IT?** Empathy is the ability to imagine what someone else might be feeling. It is far more than simply a nice sentiment, and it in fact has strong evolutionary pathways and is key to maintaining human relationships.

**WHY IT'S IMPORTANT?** While as a society, we can sometimes view substance use as a “problem behavior” or an act of defiance for teens, substance use may have underlying causes that generally point to someone who is emotionally struggling. If we can begin to empathize with what our teens are feeling, whether that is anxiety, self-doubt, pressure, boredom, fear, or trauma, that empathy is the first step in having a clear understanding of why our teens are using, and how we can start to support them in not using.

The same goes for teens. Can you imagine what would happen if your teen could empathize with how you are feeling as a parent?

## SO HOW DO WE CULTIVATE EMPATHY?

### In Ourselves

- Be curious about your teen’s experiences and viewpoints.
- Listen deeply without judgment or advice. “My parent listens to me too much” said no teen, ever.
- Ask questions rather than make assumptions.
- Affirm and acknowledge what our teens are feeling in order to better appreciate their experience, and validate that experience.

### In Our Teens

- Role model empathy for others when you're together.
- When your teen has a conflict with someone, ask them what they suspect the other person is feeling or thinking.
- Try discussing your views. Instead of “No” or “You're in trouble”, explain why you are making certain decisions or having a certain emotion as a parent.
- Remember that having empathy does not mean that we understand everything about our teen's situation or how to “fix” it. It's about seeing their world through their eyes to understand how the load they carry might impact them, especially when we are talking about substance use.

# What’s The Big Deal?

Substance use in the teen years certainly is not new. In fact it seems a normal part of adolescence, whether it’s happening in our own backyard or glamorized in movies. This is just what they do, we may think. No big deal.

The reality is that it is a big deal, and here’s why:

### Brain Learning

Remember that teen brain we talked about? This is the brain that is learning new information and skills rapidly and that “learns” substances with the same efficiency. “Experimentation” with substances can spiral from one or two experimental usages, into misuse or addiction a lot easier for teen brains.

### Age Matters

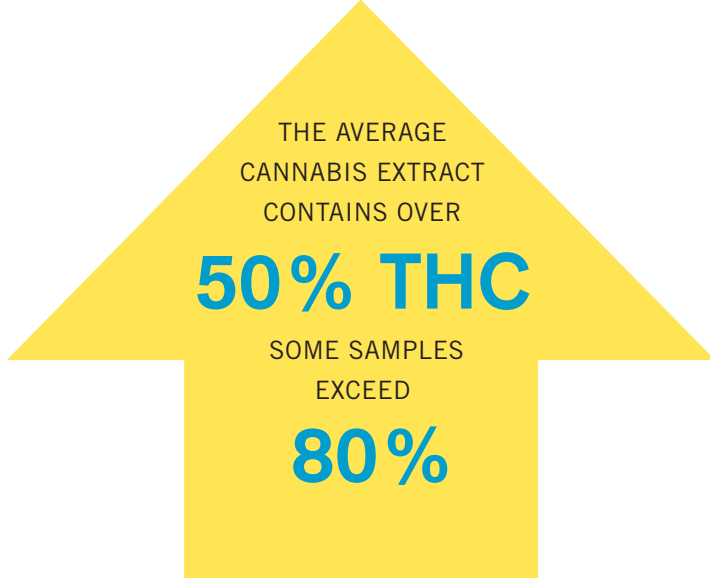
The earlier a teen starts using, the more likely it is that they will become addicted in a faster amount of time. Delaying the onset of use makes a difference, giving the brain time to develop.

### Mental Health

We know that underlying mental health challenges can lead to substance use, but we also know that substance use can lead to mental health challenges.

### Health Risks

Drugs just get more and more dangerous. There are new growing methods, new synthetic substances, laced batches, and more nicotine.



THE AVERAGE  
CANNABIS EXTRACT  
CONTAINS OVER  
**50% THC**  
SOME SAMPLES  
EXCEED  
**80%**



### FOR EXAMPLE, DID YOU KNOW THAT:

- Vaping products often contain nicotine in high doses. One “pod” of Juul or Puff Bars contain the equivalent of 40-50 cigarettes worth of nicotine.
- Cannabis can have many times over the amount of THC in it than it had in the ‘80s, and with newer methods of using cannabis that can deliver a more concentrated dose of the drug.
- Substances laced with fentanyl are becoming more common, and tragic fentanyl-related deaths have hit home in the three counties in recent years.
- Substance use leads to other risky behaviors with life-altering consequences, whether that means driving drunk or high, or having unprotected sex.

## Something Is Happening In Our Counties

We can count ourselves among the lucky ones to live in this Tri-County region. With beautiful natural surroundings, easy access to outdoor play, and a strong sense of community, it’s no wonder that our counties rank among the healthiest in California.

But something is happening in our counties. Over the past ten years, the rate of overdose Emergency Department visits for teenagers (15-19 year-olds) climbed by 19% in Monterey County and Santa Cruz County, and by 170% in San Benito County. In all three counties, alcohol and drug use by 11th graders is higher than the California average. For our entire Tri-County population, drug-related deaths have doubled in the last decade, with fentanyl poisoning and overdoses increasing exponentially.

There’s no one answer to what fuels teen substance use, and no one solution. But we do know some of the factors that may contribute to teen use in our counties:

### Access

It’s no secret (at least not to teens) that it’s easy to get substances, whether from the local retailer, at a house party, or online. We know that teen substance use is a community issue, and that community access leads to higher rates of use.

### Visibility

While most of us raise our children with educational messages that deter teen drug use, the messages that teens actually receive are far more confusing. The visibility of substances, through community events, dispensaries, social media, advertisements for cannabis delivery, and even adult use, shape the way teens view drugs.

### Underlying Mental And Emotional Challenges

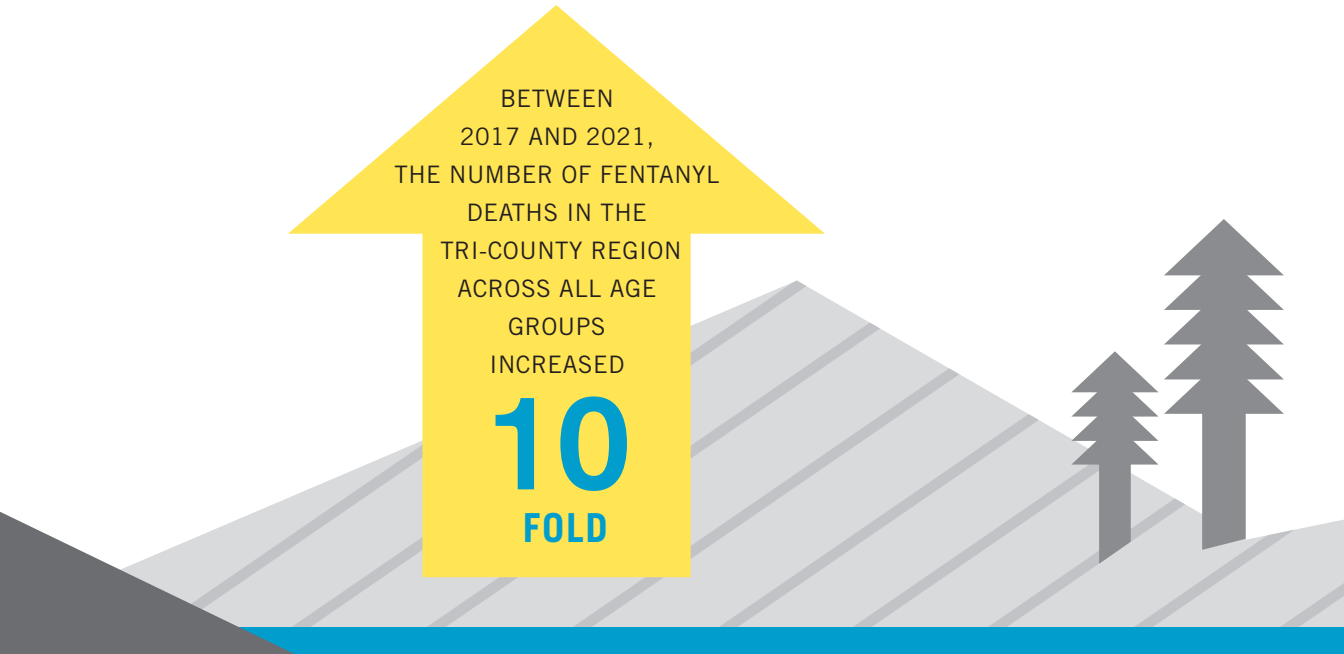
People of all ages are faced with higher rates of anxiety and depression, and trying to cope with life’s challenges. Experiences of trauma, loss, or high degrees of stress, without adequate social and emotional support, are a primary reason why people use substances, including teenagers.

### Community Culture

We are three counties, connected by our geographic location, our appreciation for our natural surroundings and our community, but unique in our demographics and our cultures. Part of helping our teens navigate substance use is to start talking about how our community cultures may be contributing to norms and behaviors around drug use.

For example, do you live in a community with an open drug culture where alcohol and drugs are highly visible or glorified? Are the presence of dispensaries and 420 celebrations potentially sending mixed messages to teens about their own potential use? Or do you live in a community that just doesn’t talk about it and believes that overdose deaths happen somewhere else? Does the silence and secrecy contribute to the problem, leaving our kids to quietly figure it all out on their own? Do you live in a community where there is, quite honestly, just nothing to do, leaving our teens bored and searching for stimulation that they find in substances?

Let’s start talking about community culture and get curious about how it may be impacting teen use.



BETWEEN  
2017 AND 2021,  
THE NUMBER OF FENTANYL  
DEATHS IN THE  
TRI-COUNTY REGION  
ACROSS ALL AGE  
GROUPS  
INCREASED

**10**  
FOLD

# Parenting To Support Our Teens

We know there is no one right way to parent, and the choices any one of us makes about how to raise our kids are our own. But we also know that we all need a little help, especially during the teen years when the guidance is minimal. We've already talked about some of the ways we can support our teens: by cultivating and role modeling empathy, by helping them understand how their brains learn substances, and by developing positive coping skills.

Here are some additional key points for helping your teens navigate substance use through these years, recommended by the professionals who have dedicated their research to figuring out how we can do right by our kids and our families.

## Parents And Caretakers Matter

It may seem like what you think no longer matters, especially compared to your teen's friends. What we know is that this just isn't true. While your teen is growing their appreciation of a peer network, parents can still have the greatest impact on their teens. Here are a few ways:

### Role Modeling

Our actions and attitudes have told our kids a story about substance use since they were young. Now may be the time to reflect upon what you have already communicated about alcohol and drug use, often without realizing it. Are these the messages that you wanted to communicate? If they are, then keep reinforcing those messages through conversations that your teen is now old enough to have. If you suspect that your kids got a story that isn't the one you want for them, then now is the time to start writing a different story.

### Monitoring

We want our kids to learn independence and good decision making skills. The key is to encourage those skills with safe and clear boundaries that are established and monitored. Kids who have rules and know that they are being supervised are at less risk for substance use.

## TRY ON SOME OF THESE IDEAS:

- If your teen goes out at night, establish an expectation that when they come home they have to say goodnight or even give you a goodnight hug. This is true even if they have to wake you up.
- Know your kids' friends and their parents. With good friends, create a parent pact that establishes parenting values and rules across families. If your teen is spending time with a new friend, require that you at least touch base with that friend's parent to introduce yourself.
- Allow your teen independent time with friends on weekends or after school but require regular check-ins.
- Establish this rule: you need to know where, when, and with whom. If any one of these facts change at any time, your teen notifies you.
- Ensure that there is accountability if the rules are broken. Your teen is figuring out independence and that's an important task for them, and one that parents get to support by lending their trust. But if trust is broken, then independence gets scaled back. Example: your teen missed curfew. Then scale back curfew for a while.

## Involvement

Remember how your child's eyes would light up when you agreed to play super heroes with them or read a favorite book while they sat in your lap? While the "play" certainly looks different now, and the response may not be as enthusiastic as it once was, that involvement and engagement is still important. Even if your teen is sending you messages that say they don't want involvement (a closed bedroom door, a roll of the eyes when we ask "how was your day?" or a straightforward "stay out of my life!"), the reality is that our teens still crave knowing that we care. They still make sense of the world through their attachment to us.

## It May Look Different

As we talk about the importance of parental presence, we also acknowledge the reality of diverse lived experiences for families living in the Tri-County region. Many parents and caregivers work full-time, hold multiple jobs or care for aging or sick family members. Adult monitoring and involvement is essential, but it can look different for different households. Some may include neighbors or grandparents to support the raising of kids. Some families may seek support from school programs. We don't necessarily have the ability to be present in the ways we always want but we can strive to build community around our kids to help keep them safe.

**I PLEAD, AS PARENTS, TEACHERS, MENTORS,  
TO PAY ATTENTION, TO KNOW WHERE THEY  
ARE, WHO THEY ARE WITH. TO SET BOUNDARIES  
BECAUSE NO MATTER WHAT THEY SAY THEY  
LIKELY DON'T YET HAVE THEM. TO FIGHT FOR  
THEM AND WITH THEM. TO NOT BE NAÏVE AS  
TO THE FRIGHTENING CHOICES THEY HAVE  
AT THEIR FINGERTIPS. TO WATCH FOR THEIR  
SADNESS OR PAIN. TO LISTEN TO THE THINGS  
THEY AREN'T SAYING. I COULDN'T STOP THE  
TRAIN MY XANDER FOUND HIMSELF ON BUT IF  
ONE YOUNG LIFE CAN BE CHANGED THEN HIS  
LEGACY IS WORTH EVERYTHING.**

**TORI KROPP, PARENT OF XANDER, WHO DIED OF A FENTANYL POISONING**

#### **TRY ON SOME OF THESE IDEAS:**

- Attend parent meetings and events at the school—and let your teen know that you are going.
- Notice when they are having a tough day, without trying to fix it or demanding you know why. Offer something like, “It seems like it’s been a tough day, and I’m sorry. I’m here if you want to talk or just have some ice cream quietly together.”
- Create family rituals and communicate that they are important, such as family dinners, even brief.
- If your teen has a close circle of friends, create opportunities for other teens and their parents to have fun together.
- Support and show interest in your teen as they find their own interests, whether that is a sport or an artistic talent or volunteering.
- Don’t be discouraged if they seem to ignore you. They may be annoyed by you, but they also heard that you care, which is a feeling that will last far longer than the annoyance.

#### **Bonding With Boundaries**

As our kids get older, a whole new way of relating to each other grows. Suddenly they can have interesting conversations, they can take on new responsibilities, and in some ways they may start to seem like . . . well, like a friend. At the same time, many of the impulses of adolescence are pulling them away from us. This can feel at times, for parents, like a deep loss. What happened to my baby who wanted to spend time with me? In this situation, it’s really easy to go a route that keeps our kids close, which is the way of friendship. This can feel like a win! You may find your teen to be more honest, communicative, and kinder to you at first.

But here’s the problem: in order to keep the jovial feelings of friendship going, we also have to maintain the fun and the lack of conflict, and this means that we have to let go of rules, expectations, and accountability. In the long run, research shows, undoubtedly, that these are the structures that set kids up for successful adulthoods and for long term positive attachment to their parents. When we look at parenting styles, those deemed most successful in supporting teens through the challenges of this developmental period are the ones that exhibit warmth, positive regard, and trust, but also establish clear boundaries and consequences. So how do we maintain that balance? Try these ideas:

### Hear Them Out

When your teen asks if they can do something, hear them out. Let them know that you will always have a conversation about it, but that you get to have the final say. Even if you suspect your answer will be “no”, still let your teen propose their case. It will give them the opportunity to think through the issues, like safety, good judgment, practicality and logistics. You may actually find that your teen makes a good case and you feel comfortable saying “OK!” But if the answer is still “no,” then you can thank your teen for putting so much thought into it, and you can explain your response. You can also follow this up with what they can do. Perhaps there is a compromise now that you’ve both shared your thoughts.

### Explain the Rules

Explain why the rules are what they are (hint: the rules aren’t what they are “because otherwise you’ll make trouble.”) The rules are what they are “because I care about you and my job as your parent is to make sure you develop smart life skills and explore independence safely. We have this rule because I love you.”

## Communication

It’s all about communication, and we’ve been talking about this one all along. Here are some more ideas to try:

### Talk Early and Often

Start talking early at an appropriate developmental level and make it an ongoing conversation. If you haven’t started yet, start now.

### Don’t Lecture

Ask questions and create space for your teen’s voice, rather than lecturing. “So what do you think about what happened at school last week?”

### TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TIMES FOR TALKING

- Car rides are private, you can’t get away, but your teen also doesn’t have to look at you.
- Watching television together can provide teachable moments and conversation starters. “So what did you think about the party scene? Did that look like something familiar to you?”
- Local occurrences, even if they are tragic, are opportunities for discussion. Our teens are seeing them, feeling them, and need to be guided through them.

## SOMETIMES [TEENS] DON’T EVEN NEED ADVICE, THEY JUST WANT TO HEAR, ‘I’M WORRIED ABOUT YOU AND I LOVE YOU AND I WANT TO SEE YOU GROW OLD.’

### MONTEREY COUNTY TEEN

### Communicate Your Values

Research shows that parental attitudes towards substances have an impact on whether or not our kids use substances. For example, do you believe that drinking in moderation is perfectly fine once someone is of legal age and knows how to moderate their use? Are you someone who believes that alcohol intake is something to be saved for social times? Do you think that alcohol should not be used at all? Whatever your belief is, identify it and share it.

You can have a Zero Tolerance policy and also let your teen know that you will be there to keep them safe if they break that policy. Sound like a contradiction? Try this: “In this household, we don’t allow substance use as teens because we care about you and your health. Because your safety is what’s important to us, we want you to know that if you ever break this rule and you need help getting out of an unsafe situation, then we will be there to support you.”

### Exit Plan

Talk to your teen about having an “exit plan”. If they ever get into a situation that feels unsafe with substances, what is their plan?

### Take a Moment

Before communicating about a hard situation, take a moment to recognize and convey the right emotion. Quite often, as parents, we show up angry, when the real feelings are fear, worry, disappointment, protectiveness and love. Your teen will hear your real emotions better than the anger.

## Parties

How do we monitor teens and parties, when there are so many causes for celebration, from homecoming dances to birthday milestones? Try these tips:

### Don’t Host a Party and Allow Teen Substance Use in Your Home

While there is a popular belief that this keeps kids safer because they are at home, the research tells us that this doesn’t create safety. It instead tells kids

that it's okay and promotes more use. Additionally, research indicates that when parents allow use at home, kids are more likely to drink and drive in the long run.

#### **Avoid Party Buses When Possible**

Party buses involve exactly what the name implies: alcohol and drug use. If an older teen is attending Prom on a party bus, make sure precautions are taken to avoid substance use.

#### **Be Cautious With Sleepovers For Older Kids**

Do you know and trust the parents? Will they be home? Do the parents share your rules on substance use?

#### **Ride Sharing Services like Lyft or Uber Can Be Helpful in Emergency Situations.**

But we also don't want these services to become a way for our teens to diminish accountability. Ideally a family establishes the trust needed for a teen to call their parent or another trusted adult to avoid an unsafe situation. If needed, consider using ride sharing services with agreements about how it will be used and parental monitoring.

#### **Educate Your Teen About How To Help In Case Of Alcohol Poisoning Or Drug Overdose.**

Teach your teen to recognize the warning signs of poisoning and overdose and to then take important life-saving steps. When they call for an ambulance or law enforcement, the Good Samaritan Law gives them legal protection. You can also make sure your teen knows how to use Narcan and has it with them (see page 29) in order to save a life.

### **HOW TO NAVIGATE THE TEEN PARTY SCENE**

For more guidance, you might try a local online resource, available in English and Spanish, at Be The Influence.

[www.betheinfluence.us/bti-party-guide](http://www.betheinfluence.us/bti-party-guide)

[www.betheinfluence.us/guia-para-fiestas](http://www.betheinfluence.us/guia-para-fiestas)

#### **It Takes A Village**

As we grapple with the balance between monitoring our kids and allowing them to explore independence, it really does take a village to support our teens. We know that adults can help keep teens safe, and that means that helping our kids navigate substance use through the teen years requires a community of concerned and supportive adults. Try reaching out to the parents of your teen's friends, or attending parent meetings or workshops at school to create a network.

# Uppers, Downers, All Arounders

The information available on specific substances is endless, and often overwhelming. Sometimes as parents we feel like we have to know it all in order to know what our teens are up against, or to know what to look out for in our child's behavior. But we don't have to know it all.

Included here is an overview of basic categories of substances, with a focus on some of the heavier used substances in our community. Your teen also learns about substances in their health or social issues class at school. This is a prime opportunity to start a conversation, find out what they are learning and what they already know, and share what you know. Remember: you don't have to be the expert, and your teen is actually more likely to engage in a dialogue if it feels like they have something to teach you as well.

#### **An Overview**

**Uppers**, or Stimulants, stimulate the body's central nervous system, increasing a person's energy, heart rate, and blood pressure. Poor sleep and poor appetite are frequent effects, and the user may feel a sense of euphoria, confidence, and focus. Examples: Cocaine, ADHD medications that were not prescribed to the user, Methamphetamines, Nicotine, and certain party drugs like Ecstasy.

**Downers**, or Depressants, slow down the body's central nervous system, impacting brain function, sleep, coordination, memory and judgment, and slowing down breathing and pulse. Examples: Alcohol, Xanax, Heroin, Antihistamines, Ativan.

**All Arounders** can act as uppers or downers, but their main effect is to distort perception of reality, impair judgment and reasoning, and cause hallucinations and distorted perceptions of reality. Examples: Cannabis, Mushrooms, LSD.

FOR A COMPREHENSIVE  
GUIDE TO VARIOUS  
SUBSTANCES, CHECK OUT  
[WWW.DRUGFREE.ORG](http://WWW.DRUGFREE.ORG)



# SPOTLIGHT ON NICOTINE

**WHAT IS IT?** Nicotine is a chemical derived from tobacco plants which is best known for being the addictive property in cigarettes. Nicotine is also often found in e-cigarettes. Several products include nicotine in smaller doses that are designed for people wanting to quit smoking, such as nicotine gums or patches.

**WHY DO TEENS USE IT?** Nicotine causes a surge of adrenaline and a release of dopamine, the happy hormone. It can make someone feel relaxed and reduce anxiety, and even increase concentration.

**WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** When nicotine enters the bloodstream and travels to the brain, it takes over the part of our brains that are responsible for recognizing pleasure. Usually we might recognize pleasure in a day spent with friends or a hike or a really great movie, and these happy moments cause our brain to release dopamine, a hormone responsible for happy feelings. But nicotine “hijacks” our brain’s reward pathway with an unusually high surge of dopamine. The brain adapts to that surge, and in order to maintain that level, the brain needs more nicotine. In fact, nicotine is as addictive as heroin.

Aside from being the chemical that gets a person hooked on cigarettes or vaping, nicotine comes along with its own negative health impacts. It increases heart rate and risk of harmful blood clotting, disturbs sleep, increases risk for fertility issues, diabetes, hypertension, and respiratory failure.

**KNOW THE SIGNS:** Most teens who are using nicotine are getting it through vaping products, and to a lesser degree, cigarettes. Some signs might include: finding unusual looking devices with detachable parts, weight loss, behavioral changes and agitation, mouth and throat irritation such as mouth sores and throat clearing.

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Chew, smokes, cigs, pods, puffs, juul

ONE “POD”  
OF JUUL OR  
PUFF BARS  
CONTAINS THE  
EQUIVALENT OF

**40-50**

CIGARETTES  
WORTH OF  
NICOTINE

# SPOTLIGHT ON ALCOHOL

**WHAT IS IT?** Beer, wine, and liquor are all downers, which can seem counter-intuitive since a lot of people drink alcohol to “loosen up” and have more fun. Alcohol impairs our body’s functions by slowing down our brain, our body coordination, our heart rate and breathing, our decision making ability, and our reaction time.

**WHY DO TEENS USE IT?** Alcohol is easy to get, easy to consume, and socially accepted. It lets the user unwind, relaxes inhibitions, and it can feel, well, fun (at first).

**WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** The big deal is that teens tend to use alcohol to get drunk, and our bodies don’t actually like being drunk at all. That initial relaxing buzz can quickly turn into over-consumption, leading to a long list of problematic outcomes.

**Vomiting and Hangovers:** Hangovers are our bodies’ very efficient way of telling us that we have done something unkind to ourselves. Vomiting is the body’s defense mechanism against substances that are toxic, whether it’s food poisoning, accidentally consuming a toxic plant, or drinking too much alcohol. The body reads this as a poison, and a hangover is its very loud protest.

**Decision-Making:** Alcohol also has a habit of really messing with good judgment. A youth who otherwise makes healthy decisions will be more inclined to make some unhealthy moves, like getting in a car with someone who has been drinking, having unsafe sex, and drinking even more alcohol.

**Poisoning:** Heavy drinking can lead to alcohol poisoning, which is a life threatening condition where the body slows down so much that body temperature drops, breathing and heart rate slows, and a person loses consciousness. A person with alcohol poisoning needs medical attention. But if that person is surrounded by other people whose drinking has impaired their judgment, who calls 911?

**Addiction:** The teen brain learns alcohol fast, and it develops a tolerance to it that requires higher and higher levels of consumption in order to get the buzz. It’s a downward spiral into addiction, and long-term consequences like heart and liver disease.

**KNOW THE SIGNS:** Slurred speech, lack of coordination, hangover symptoms

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Handle, bottle, beverage, juice, drinks



# SPOTLIGHT ON CANNABIS

**WHAT IS IT?** Cannabis refers to all products containing THC that users smoke, vape, otherwise inhale, eat and drink. But cannabis is no longer the same drug from generations before. The levels of THC have increased, and the ways that teens use cannabis have altered to deliver higher and more concentrated doses of the drug. Smoked, brewed as a tea, vaped, eaten, and dabbed, cannabis' chemical composition and usages are now far more varied.

**WHY DO TEENS USE IT?** Generally teens use cannabis to relax, and because it's perceived as socially acceptable and not as dangerous as other drugs.

**WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** The view of cannabis as "natural" has often been equated with "safe," leading generations of people to wonder, "what's the harm?" But today's cannabis, with higher levels of THC, varied methods of use, and forms that no longer even resemble a plant, comes with substantial negative short-term and long-term impacts on health. The research also indicates that age matters: teens who use cannabis regularly experience greater and longer lasting negative impacts on the brain compared with people who started smoking as adults. Let's take a look at what the research says about the risks:

**AT 17 XANDER TOLD ME 'MOM—THE FIRST TIME I SMOKED WEED I DIDN'T HURT INSIDE. I JUST WANTED TO BE A NORMAL TEENAGER.' HE FOUND A WAY TO EASE HIS PAIN.**

**TORI KROPP, PARENT OF XANDER, WHO DIED OF A FENTANYL POISONING**



# SPOTLIGHT ON CANNABIS

**Cognitive Impairment:** Consistent cannabis use has been associated with a decline in brain function such as memory, executive functioning, and processing.

**Addiction:** Starting to use cannabis during the teen years can cause an increased risk of physical dependence and addiction.

**Mental Health:** Cannabis use has been linked to increased mental illness, including depression, anxiety, and psychosis among teens.

**Suicide:** Teens who use cannabis are more likely to make suicide attempts.

**Poor Academic Performance:** Teens who use cannabis regularly are more likely to have school absences and drop out from school.

**Lack of Motivation:** Regular cannabis users are more likely to experience amotivational disorder, meaning that they lack the will to engage in the activities that benefit them in life.

**Diminished Life Satisfaction and Achievement:** Cannabis users are at higher risk of struggling in life, including lower income, greater need for socioeconomic assistance, unemployment, engaging in criminal behavior, and lower self-rated satisfaction with life.

**Other Drug Use:** Frequent use of cannabis by adolescents showed a 130% greater likelihood of misusing opioids. Early initiation of cannabis is a main predictor of Opioid Use Disorder.

**Poisonings:** Edible cannabis products like gummies and candies have increased the risk of unintentional overdose, as well as accidental ingestion by children, adolescents, and pets.

**Motor Vehicle Safety and Accidents:** Cannabis use has caused an increased risk for motor vehicle accidents.

**KNOW THE SIGNS:** Slowed thinking and response time, impaired coordination, paranoia, glassy eyes, increased appetite, inappropriate laughter, anxiety, drop in grades or disinterest in previously enjoyed activities, more tired and less motivated, change in friend group.

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Bush, bud, tree, kush, weed, skunk, ganja, devil's lettuce, jazz tobacco, loud, carts

# SPOTLIGHT ON PILLS

**WHAT ARE THEY?** Pills can be either prescribed by a health care provider or illegally made and distributed.

Prescription pills are specifically designed for a person for medical reasons, and even when taken as directed, they can come with unwanted side effects. In any other situation, pills can become dangerous, such as when they are:

- Taken by someone other than the person who received the prescription
- Taken in larger amounts or at a frequency greater than prescribed
- Crushed and snorted
- Mixed with alcohol or other drugs

Illegally developed “street drugs” often come in pill form. Some of these are fake versions of prescription medications that have potentially deadly additional substances added, like fentanyl.

- Opioids that are intended to treat severe pain, like Oxycontin and Fentanyl
- Benzodiazepines, which are sedatives that slow down the body's central nervous system, such as Xanax
- Stimulants such as those that are prescribed for ADHD, such as Adderall or Ritalin

**WHY DO TEENS USE THEM?** Teens use these drugs for the high they create, either euphoric or deeply relaxing depending on the substance. Teens also may be self-medicating to “feel better” in the face of life challenges. Teens who experience depression or anxiety may look to substances such as Xanax as a way to relieve their symptoms. Those who feel the pressure of school achievement may find themselves looking for Adderall as a way to focus on their studies.

Many of our teens need to look no further than our own home medicine cabinets to find prescription pills. Some teens may use a friend's prescription. All of these drugs are also available as fake pills or street drugs, available through friends, social networks and even online.

# SPOTLIGHT ON PILLS



## OPIOIDS & THE FENTANYL CRISIS

Opioids are most known as prescriptions for pain relief, but they can also be illegally manufactured and distributed in forms such as heroin. Both prescription and illicit forms of the drug can lead to fatal overdose when breathing is substantially slowed or stopped.

Fentanyl is one form of opioid that causes the majority of overdose deaths in the United States. Fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin. In its illegally manufactured form, it is often mixed with more expensive drugs such as cocaine or methamphetamines for higher profits for manufacturers and dealers, and higher potency and addiction for users. More recently, Fentanyl is being pressed into pills made to look like prescription medications. A user may think they are taking Xanax or Oxycontin, but the pill is in fact mixed or “laced” with toxic levels of fentanyl. The unpredictable and unknown quantity of fentanyl in a pill means that a single pill can kill.

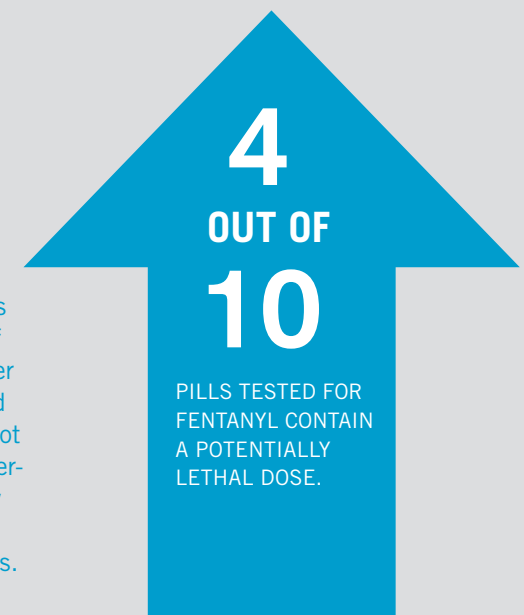
An opioid overdose or fentanyl poisoning can happen to anyone, but the risk increases when a person takes a high daily dosage of prescription opioids, mixes opioids with other drugs and alcohol, takes illegal opioids that may contain other substances, or has an underlying medical condition.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK SOMEONE IS EXPERIENCING AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

- Call 911 immediately
- Administer Naloxone if you have it
- If you are trained, perform CPR
- Lay the person on their side to prevent choking

## NALOXONE (NARCAN)

Naloxone, commonly known as Narcan, is a medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. It is easy to administer through a nasal spray, it works quickly and effectively to prevent deaths, and it cannot harm someone if they are not actually overdosing. Naloxone can be administered by any person who has been trained to use it, including parents, caregivers and teens.





# SPOTLIGHT ON PILLS



## BENZODIAZEPINES

These pills are often referred to as sedatives or mild tranquilizers, the most common of which are Xanax, Valium, and Ativan. These drugs slow down the communication between brain and body, creating a calming effect that can be used to treat conditions such as anxiety, insomnia and seizures.

Although this class of drugs is most known to parents and caretakers as prescription medication, benzodiazepines should only be rarely prescribed because of a high risk of addiction and unintentional death.

Undesired side effects may include drowsiness, poor coordination and balance, trouble concentrating, memory impairment, and in some cases depression. These side effects can occur even when taken for medical reasons as prescribed, but when taken differently than as prescribed, in combination with other substances, or when acquired illegally, these drugs can have dangerous effects, including overdose and death. The most dangerous risk with benzodiazepines is their use in combination with other drugs, particularly alcohol or opioids.

## STIMULANTS

Stimulants are a class of drugs that speed up the communication between the brain and body. The most common stimulants include caffeine, amphetamines and cocaine. These drugs create a feeling of being more alert, energetic and even confident or euphoric. When used in larger doses, amphetamines may cause anxiety, panic attacks, nausea and headaches, seizures, and even coma and death.

Adderall is a commonly prescribed amphetamine used to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). When used as prescribed, Adderall is an important treatment strategy that improves focus and reduces impulsivity. But what happens to the teen who does not have ADHD but uses it to produce a high or to improve their focus and concentration?

Adderall works differently on the non-ADHD brain than it would on someone who has been prescribed the medication. Adderall causes a helpful increase of dopamine in someone with ADHD, but in the non-ADHD brain, the flood of unnatural levels of dopamine creates a euphoric high. Although

# SPOTLIGHT ON PILLS

enjoyable at first, repeated use can lead to increased blood pressure, heart rate and body temperature, disrupted sleep and appetite, hostility and paranoia, and addiction. Chronic and abusive use of Adderall leads the user to experience a crash as dopamine levels fall, and eventually a person can't function normally without it. When Adderall is mixed with alcohol or other drugs, the effect can be life threatening.

## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT PILLS

- Ensure that any prescription medications in the home are locked up, and only taken as prescribed by the intended user
- Make sure your teen knows about “fake” prescription pills. When a person takes so-called prescription pills from the illegal drug market, there is a growing risk of fentanyl poisoning and death
- Use testing strips to know if a drug contains fentanyl
- Let your kids know about the dangers of mixing pills with other substances
- Think about how you talk about your own prescription sharing around your children
- Safely dispose of any unused or expired medications so they cannot be misused
- Teach your family members about how to use Narcan and keep it in the home



**FENTANYL IS KILLING MY FRIENDS  
... KILLING OFF MY GENERATION  
OF BEAUTIFUL, TALENTED PEOPLE.**

WILLIAM CHAPPELEAR, DECEMBER 1995-JANUARY 2022

# SPOTLIGHT ON EXPERIMENTATION

A WEEK BEFORE MY SON DIED HE TOLD ME HOW GRATEFUL HE WAS TO BE ALIVE. HE WENT TO THE ER AFTER AN OVERDOSE AND WAS SAVED WITH NARCAN. SO HE KNEW ABOUT FENTANYL, AND HE WAS WARNING HIS FRIENDS ABOUT IT. BUT THEN HE TOOK HALF A XANAX THAT HE BOUGHT FROM A DEALER TO HELP WITH HIS CHRONIC ANXIETY. HE DIED IN HIS SLEEP.

THE MESSAGE RIGHT NOW NEEDS TO BE: THERE IS NO ROOM FOR EXPERIMENTATION. YOUNG PEOPLE THINK THEY ARE IMMORTAL AND THAT IT CAN'T HAPPEN TO THEM. BUT RIGHT NOW YOU CANNOT TOUCH ANYTHING THAT COMES FROM THE STREET. MY SON DID NOT WANT TO DIE. I KNOW THAT.

SOPHIE, WILLIAM'S MOM

## EXPERIMENTATION CARRIES A LOAD OF RISKS

Experimentation is often considered a hallmark of the teen years. It is true that biological, social, and emotional factors align in the teen years to make experimentation very possible. Healthy, happy kids with engaged parents and strong community networks still may experiment with substances. Some of these kids come through that experimentation safely and without any serious repercussions. But experimentation carries a load of risks, and it can be an awfully slippery slope. Let's take a look at why experimentation can be a lot more serious than we may think.

**Remember That Teen Brain?** It learns substances fast and hard, with addiction occurring more easily in teens than in adults. So how many episodes of substance use still count as experimentation? When exactly does the brain learn to read the substance as normal and necessary? These are the questions that make experimentation a risky experiment.

**Substances Temporarily Heal the Wounds of Teens Who Are Hurting.** Even if a teen is just experimenting for fun, they may discover that substances provide relief from emotional aches. Experimentation may start as normal teen activity, but it can quickly spiral into misuse or addiction, becoming a daily coping mechanism.

**Lacing and Cutting Is a Real Problem.** This is when an unknown substance is mixed into a drug to make it cheaper to manufacture, without the user knowing it. In recent years, the drug fentanyl has been a popular lacing agent, and it has been the cause of fatal poisonings right here in the Tri-County region. All it takes is one time to use the wrong drug.

**Accidents Happen.** Substances alter a user's brain in ways that substantially increase the likelihood of dangerous accidents. When a person loses their motor skills, their decision making skills, their reaction time, or their perception of reality, bad things can happen. Car accidents. Hypothermia. Falls. If we accept that it is normal for teens to experiment, we are accepting the risk that comes with each and every use of substances.

**Be Aware of Polydrug Use.** Using more than one substance at the same time can have dangerous, and even fatal effects.

# Legal and School Consequences

There are important policies out there that are established to protect our kids and help them do the right thing to protect their friends. Some of these policies even apply to parents. Here are a handful of important laws to know:

## **Underage Use**

Although recreational alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are legal for adult use in California, that does NOT mean that teen use of these substances is ok. Possession and use of these substances still has legal consequences for youth under the legal age.

## **Driving**

The underage possession, consumption or purchase of alcohol can lead to the suspension of a driver's license or delay in acquiring one, even if the person is nowhere near a car. It is illegal for an underage driver to operate a car with a blood alcohol content of 0.01% (compared to .08% for an adult with a clean driving record).

## **Adults Providing Substances**

Adults can be charged with a misdemeanor for giving or buying substances for underage youth, leading to fines and significant jail time. Important: A young person is considered an adult at age 18, and can be tried as an adult for giving substances to underage friends.

## **Good Samaritan Laws**

These laws are intended to save lives by encouraging witnesses of drug overdose and alcohol poisoning to call 911 for help, without fear of legal consequences. As we teach our kids to do the right thing, this is an important law to understand and to translate for our kids. How do we explain this law? Try something like this: "I want you to know about a really important law that helps you to be a good person when substances are around. If you are using alcohol or drugs and you call 911 to help a friend who is in trouble, you will not get into legal trouble for your own use. You are protected because you did the right thing. If on the other hand, you know someone's safety is in danger and you do not call for help, you could actually get into

trouble because you allowed someone to knowingly be in danger. I expect that you will do the right thing. And you can expect that when you do the right thing, I will support you."

## **Decriminalization Policies**

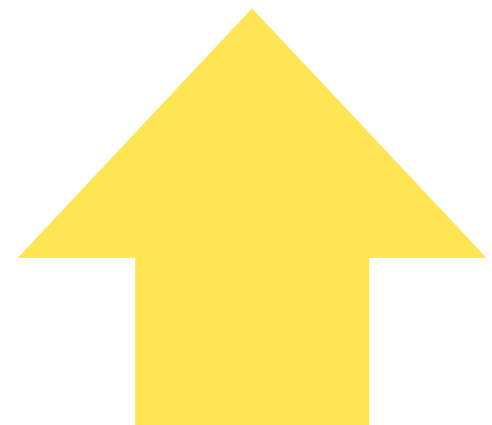
Policies that decriminalize certain substances are often intended to improve regulation, decrease stigma, reduce incarceration and manage resources. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of decriminalization policies can also be that teens' perceptions of harm decrease, and favorable attitudes towards certain substances increase. As a region, and particularly in counties with more open drug culture and decriminalization policies, we need to be aware of this potential effect, and we need to be talking to our kids about it. You can choose to support these policies while also taking an active role in ensuring that your kids aren't interpreting these policies in ways that are harmful to them.

## **School Policies**

Every school and district has their own policy on how to treat substance use on school campuses. You can check out your school's Student/Parent Handbooks or District Board Policies for more information.

**PUNISHING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR EXPERIMENTING IS NOT PRODUCTIVE. SKILLS TRAINING ON HOW TO NAVIGATE THEIR ENVIRONMENT, MAKE DECISIONS AND PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR PEERS DURING THEIR RISK-TAKING YEARS IS A MORE PRODUCTIVE ALTERNATIVE.**

**DON CARNEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YOUTH TRANSFORMING JUSTICE**



# Finding Support

Let's Talk is an initiative of the Central Coast Tri-County Coalition, which aims to make enduring change so that all people in our region experience well-being and safety in a connected, resilient community environment. Rooted in core values of compassion, dignity, and equity, the Coalition focuses on youth, education and prevention to prevent substance use, decrease the harms of substance use, and ensure equitable access to support and treatment so that all people can thrive. Let's Talk is supported by the California Overdose Prevention Network, a project of the PHI Center for Health Leadership and Impact. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of PHI.

## RESOURCES

If you are looking for therapeutic care, you can talk with your healthcare provider or school-based counselor for support linking to resources.

### SAN BENITO COUNTY

**Bright Future Recovery**  
831-245-1623

**Family Service Agency of the Central Coast Suicide Prevention**  
831-459-9373

**Hazel Hawkins Hospital Emergency Dept**  
831-636-2640

**San Benito County Opioid Task Force**  
sbcopioidtaskforce.org

**San Benito County Resource Guide**  
sbcopioidtaskforce.org/printable-sbc-resource-guide

**SBC Behavioral Health Services 24 hr line**  
831-636-4020

**SBCBH Esperanza Center**  
831-636-4020, xt.309

**Sun Street Centers**  
831-265-7317

**Valley Health Associates**  
831-424-6655

**Youth Alliance**  
831-636-2853

**Youth Recovery Connections**  
831-387-8161

### MONTEREY COUNTY

**Behavioral Health Monterey County, CA**  
888-258-6029  
co.monterey.ca.us

**The Bridge Restoration Ministry**  
831-372-2033  
ww.tbrm.org

**Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula Emergency Dept**  
831-625-4900

**Community Human Services**  
Monterey 831-658-3811  
Salinas 831-237-7222  
chservices.org

**Door to Hope Comprehensive Behavioral Health Programs and Services**  
831-758-0181  
doortohope.org

**Interim, Inc. Housing, Healing Hope: The Path to Mental Health**  
831-649-4522  
interiminc.org

**Mee Memorial Hospital Emergency Dept**  
831-385-6000

**Natividad Medical Center**  
831-755-4111

**Ohana, Center for Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health**  
831-OHANA01 (642-6201)  
www.montagehealth.org/ohana

**Prescribe Safe Monterey, CA | Montage Health**  
Printable MCPSI Resource Guide  
montagehealth.org/prescribesafe

**Recovery Center**  
831-625-4608  
montagehealth.org

**Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital Emergency Dept**  
831-757-4333

**Sun Street Centers The Road to Recovery**  
831-753-5144  
sunstreetcenters.org

**Valley Health Associates Salinas**  
831-424-6655  
valleyhealthassociates.com

### SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

**Dominican Hospital**  
831-462-7700

**Encompass Community Services Youth & Family Behavioral Health**  
encompasscs.org

**Harm Reduction Coalition of Santa Cruz County**  
harmreductioncoalitionofsantacruz-county.com

**NAMI Santa Cruz County (NAMISCC)**  
namiscc.org

**Pajaro Valley Prevention & Student Assistance**  
pvpsa.org

**Safe Rx Website**  
hipscc.org/saferx  
The Safe Rx website links to a comprehensive resource folder with substance use information, resources, and treatment options available in Santa Cruz County, including services available in Spanish.

**Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency**  
santacruzhealth.org

**Santa Cruz County Schools Student & Family Behavioral Health Supports**  
sccoe.link/supports

**Youth Action Network**  
sccyan.org

**Watsonville Community Hospital**  
831-724-4741



# LET'S MAKE TIME TO TALK.

Let's Talk began as a collaborative effort between Marin County Office of Education, Marin Health and Human Services and Marin Healthy Youth Partnerships, and has been adapted for the Tri-County Region by the Central Coast Tri-County Coalition.

The logo consists of a yellow square with a white triangle pointing downwards from the bottom-left corner. Inside the white area, the text "LET'S TALK." is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**LET'S  
TALK.**