

November is:

- National Runaway Prevention month
- National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week (Nov. 11-19)



- American Education week (Nov. 13-17)
- World Kindness Day (Nov. 13)
- Great American Smokeout (Nov. 16)



- International Day for Tolerance (Nov. 16)
- National Parental Involvement Day (Nov. 16)
- International Survivors of Suicide Day (Nov. 18)
- Random Acts of Kindness Friday (Nov. 24)

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Nov. 20-21—
student dismissal
at 11:30 am



Heroin's Youngest Victims

We read the statistics, hear about drug busts, and learn about another overdose from the opioid epidemic enveloping the nation. Unfortunately, there's another side to these stories that is not often discussed; the children—innocent victims—who witness the crimes and deaths that occur in their presence. These children attend school, when they can, carrying the burdens of the epidemic with them. Recently, *NBC News* started airing its series One Nation Overdosed about those caught up in this crisis.

- Nine-year-old Hagen was the one in charge at his Utah home. His mother and stepfather frequently left their children home alone so they could feed their heroin habit. Hagen often missed the bus because he would get up and get ready...by himself. Hagen also made dinner for his two younger brothers and would take care of his baby sister, who was born addicted to heroin. To prevent seizures, withdrawal, and loss of custody, the baby's stepfather would secretly rub crushed opioids on her gums. Hagen says he knows "everything. Every. Single. Thing" and he's very angry. He now lives with his biological father and stepmother who want to give him the chance to be a kid again.

- Tori was born 15 weeks premature and weighed 1 ½ pounds. For the first 10 years of her life, her mother was addicted to heroin. Tori fed and took care of herself. She had never seen a dentist or a doctor and thought of herself "as the parent and my mom as the kid." She relied on an uncle who cared for her when her mom couldn't but he eventually died from a heroin overdose. When Tori went to live with her grandparents, who now have custody, she blamed herself for her mother's addiction and thought if she had been better, "her mom wouldn't have done drugs," said Tori's custodial grandmother.

- At East Falmouth Elementary in Massachusetts, the heroin epidemic is at a crisis point with 12 parents already dead from overdoses. The principal noted that students arrive late, **if**



they come to school, and are traumatized from what they've seen at home. Students often lash out or curl up in a ball in the corner. When Josiah first started school, he would fight and hit and was very violent, stated his mother, who is now in recovery after she overdosed in front of her children. "I was not a nice mom," she admitted. To counteract the home life, East Falmouth is teaching students how to deal with emotions. Each day begins with music and breathing exercises. There is even a room where students can blow off steam if they feel out of control.

Children in these circumstances fall under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the mistreatment must be reported to Children and Youth. The 24-hour, toll-free hotline for ChildLine is 800-932-0313. A follow-up call to the Lehigh County Office of Children and Youth at 610-782-3064 or the Northampton County Department of Human Services at 610-829-6500 may be beneficial, too. Children who grow up in homes where drug abuse, criminal activity, and neglect are the norm tend to continue this cycle. To assist students, schools can:

1. plan small-groups where children feel safe to express anger, fear, guilt, or shame
2. help kids compose a list of emergency numbers and safe places
3. connect adolescents and teens with peer groups
4. schedule drug prevention education programs
5. provide positive adult mentors/role models
6. arrange after-school tutoring or homework support programs
7. handout a list of community resources where students can get help
8. connect teens with local support groups

(Sources: Narconon International website; Promises Treatment Centers website; Davies, Leah, M.Ed. "Educator's Guide to Children Affected by Parental Drug Abuse." www.kellybear.com; American Addiction Centers website)



Smoking's Harmful Effects

Millions of children breathe in secondhand smoke in their homes. Secondhand smoke (SHS)—what a smoker breathes out and what comes from the tip of burning cigarettes, pipes, and cigars—can be especially harmful to children's health because their lungs still are developing. SHS contains 4,000 chemicals; many are dangerous and more than 50 are cancer-causing.

Health Risks

Exposure to secondhand smoke puts children at a higher risk for serious health problems. They are susceptible to ear infections, colds, pneumonia, and tooth decay. Children of smokers cough and wheeze more and have a harder time getting over colds. They miss many more school days too. They are at risk for poor lung development, sleep problems, and developmental delays. SHS can cause other symptoms including a stuffy nose, headaches, sore throats, eye irritations, and hoarseness. Children with asthma may have more attacks or they may be more severe. As adults, they may experience lung cancer, heart disease, or cataracts.

Thirdhand Smoke

According to research conducted by The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) thirdhand smoke is also harmful. Thirdhand smoke is the smoke left behind—the harmful toxins that remain in places where people have smoked previously. Thirdhand smoke can be found on the upholstery of a car or even a child's hair after a caregiver smokes near the child. Young children are also at risk of ingesting dust and smoke particles when they crawl on floors and carpets and then putting their hands in their mouths after touching surfaces where smoke has settled.

(Source: "The Dangers of Secondhand Smoke." *Healthy Children.org*. 5/10/17; *American Academy of Pediatrics* fact sheet)

Homelessness and Hunger

Many American families are living on the edge of poverty, forced to choose between basic necessities like buying food, paying rent, or going to the doctor.

♦ In the United States

- ♦ **43.1 million**--Americans living below the poverty level
 - ♦ **549,000**--Americans homeless on a typical night
 - ♦ **42 million**--Americans at risk of suffering from hunger
 - ♦ **1 in 5**--children in the U.S. living in poverty
- (Source: *Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week*, 2017)

♦ In Pennsylvania

- ♦ **18.1%**--children under age 18 below the poverty line
(Source: *Center for American Progress*)
- ♦ **15,000**--homeless families in state
(Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016)

♦ In Lehigh County

- ♦ **41.9%**--children under age 18 living in low-income families
(Source: "State of the Child County Profile." *Pennsylvania Partnership for Children*. 2017)
- ♦ **35%**--number of people in Lehigh and Northampton county shelters that are children
(Source: Jennings, Alan., Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley. May 27, 2016)



Kindness is the language
which the deaf can hear and
the blind can see.

- Mark Twain

Happy Thanksgiving

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