



Upcoming Events

- Mental Health Awareness Month
- Healthy Vision Month
- 10-16/ National Prevention Week
- 15/ Endangered Species Day
- 20/ World Bee Day
- 25/ Memorial Day

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NOT 'Just Weed' Four Times More Dangerous In Three Decades

"It's just weed" is often used to downplay marijuana use, especially in social settings, but it ignores how much stronger cannabis has become. THC levels—the main psychoactive ingredient—have increased from 3.4% in 1993 to 16.14% in 2022, making today's marijuana far more potent.

Higher THC levels are linked to memory and learning problems, impaired thinking, and coordination issues, as well as increased risks of dependence and withdrawal. Research also shows potential links to serious mental health conditions like psychosis and schizophrenia, along with possible impacts on brain development and reproductive health. These concerns were highlighted in a webinar by Operation Parent, where experts emphasized the growing risks associated with modern marijuana use.

Austin Teen Shares Recovery Story to Help Others

Drug overdoses are rising across the U.S., with a sharp increase in teen cases in the Austin area, largely driven by fentanyl-laced drugs. First responders report a significant spike among youth, signaling a growing concern.

One teen, Gabi, began using drugs at 12 after losing both parents to overdoses and has survived multiple overdoses herself. Now in recovery, her story reflects a broader trend of younger teens experimenting with substances, worsened by pandemic-related isolation.

Experts warn that today's teens face heightened risks from potent and easily accessible drugs like fentanyl and delta-8. They emphasize the need for open communication, early intervention, and awareness of warning signs, noting that recovery is possible with support.

Youth Face Respiratory Risks After 30 Days of Vaping

A study found that teens and young adults may experience serious respiratory issues after just 30 days of e-cigarette use, including wheezing, shortness of breath, and bronchitis. Researchers say the findings reinforce that vaping is not risk-free, especially as use continues to rise among youth.

Among more than 2,000 participants, recent e-cigarette users had significantly higher risks of respiratory symptoms, even after accounting for other factors. Key effects persisted even without asthma, highlighting broader health concerns and the need for further research.



Energy Drink Causes Death of a 17 year-old

The family of a 17-year-old Texas cheerleader has filed a wrongful death lawsuit, claiming a popular energy drink contributed to her death from an enlarged heart linked to high caffeine intake. Their attorney said she had no prior health issues and that caffeine was the only substance found in her system.



The lawsuit alleges the drink lacked adequate warnings about cardiac risks and was heavily marketed to young people. The company maintains its products meet labeling requirements and include caffeine warnings. The teen reportedly consumed the drink regularly, and her family hopes the case raises awareness and leads to stronger safety protections.

How to Manage Prom Anxiety Tips to relieve stress around the big event

Prom can bring both excitement and anxiety, but those feelings are normal. Experts say many teens feel pressure around planning, fitting in, and wanting the night to go perfectly. Talking openly with friends, family, or trusted adults can help ease stress and remind you that you're not alone.



Common worries include appearance, money, not having a date, and after-party plans. Shifting focus to self-confidence, setting a budget, remembering that prom is about enjoying time with friends, and knowing your personal boundaries can all help reduce anxiety. With preparation and support, prom can be a fun and positive experience.

HOW TO BOOST YOUR MENTAL HEALTH



LIVE LOVE HEALTH & WEALTH CO.

CHC PROGRAMS

It is not too early to begin planning the programs you would like to bring into your schools. Schedule early to secure the programs you want, at the time that works best for you.

Available programs include:

- Vaping Education
- Current Drug Trends
- Mock Teen Bedroom
- Teens and Technology
- SOS
- BLUES
- Group Programs
- Anger Management
- Life Skills for Littles
- And much more



Get the programs you want NOW for the next school year!

For a complete listing of our programs with descriptions, please visit our website at www.thehc.org, or contact Maria Alonso-Tomlinson at mtomlinson@thehc.org.

WHEN YOU FEEL

@crazyheadcomics



Common **WARNING SIGNS** of Mental Illness

Diagnosing mental illness isn't a straightforward science. We can't test for it the same way we can test blood sugar levels for diabetes. Each condition has its own set of unique symptoms, though symptoms often overlap. Common signs and/or symptoms can include:

- ! Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- ! Trying to harm or end one's life or making plans to do so
- ! Severe, out-of-control, risk-taking behavior that causes harm to self or others
- ! Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart, physical discomfort or difficulty breathing
- ! Significant weight loss or gain



- ! Seeing, hearing or believing things that aren't real*
- ! Excessive use of alcohol or drugs
- ! Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality or sleeping habits
- ! Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still
- ! Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities

*Various communities and backgrounds might view this sign differently based on their beliefs and experiences. Some people within these communities and cultures may not interpret hearing voices as unusual.

WORRIED ABOUT YOURSELF OR SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT?



If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to ask questions



Try to understand what they're experiencing and how their daily life is impacted



Making this connection is often the first step to getting treatment

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER



Talk with a health care professional



Learn more about mental illness



Take a mental health education class



Call the NAMI HelpLine at 800-950-NAMI (6264)

50%
of all lifetime mental illness begins by age **14**

75%
by age **24**

Data from CDC, NIMH and other select sources. Find citations for this resource at nami.org/mhstats

NAMI HelpLine
800-950-NAMI (6264)



Video Gaming and Youth

2026

Research indicates video gaming is associated with a variety of both beneficial and harmful effects on children and adolescents. These effects vary based on the risk profile of the individual player as well as exposure to certain features and elements of video games.

Tweens and teens spend an average of 1.5-2.0 hours a day playing video games.

(Rideout et al., 2022)

EFFECTS ON YOUTH FROM VIDEO GAMING

Beneficial Effects from Gaming



Connection/Social

- Majority of tween/teen players (70%) say they play to connect with others
- Games are a venue where boys particularly make and connect with friends
- Cooperative games can support prosocial and helping behaviors

Cognitive

- Some research indicates youth gaming is associated with cognitive skill improvement in:
 - » Executive function, including inhibitory control (self-regulation of reactions/behavior to achieve goals)
 - » Attention
 - » Working memory
 - » Problem-solving
 - » Cognitive spatial skills
 - » Neural processing and efficiency

Note: Other research indicates these improvements are only in game play and do not translate to overall cognitive improvement.



Effects from High Amounts of Gaming



Gaming at least several hours a day is associated with an increased likelihood of:

- » Depression (particularly in boys)
- » Anxiety (particularly in girls)
- » OCD thoughts and behaviors
- » Behavioral problems
- » Self-harm (particularly in boys)
- » Suicidal ideation

Problematic gaming* is associated with:

- » Addictive behaviors
- » Attention problems
- » Exacerbation of existing mental health issues
- » Sleep problems
- » Poor posture/lower neck bone density

*Gaming patterns that interfere with daily life functioning (learn more on page 2)

(Granic et al., 2014; Lager & Corso, 2025; Lenhart et al., 2015; Miedzobrodzka et al., 2022; Park et al., 2025; Pehlivanurk et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2025; Rideout & Robb, 2021; Sala et al., 2018; Smirni, et al., 2021)

Aggression and Violent Video Gaming – Risk Profiles



Research is mixed on the relationship between aggressive behavior and violent video game play. Some research indicates that youth in certain “risk profiles” are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior after violent video game play.

- **High risk:** Male, high levels of relational aggression before gaming, high conflict family environment, low reactivity to stressful stimuli, high levels of violent video gaming
- **Low risk:** Female, high socioeconomic status, low hostility and low stress family environment, low amounts of video game play, low amounts of violent video game play

(Coyne, et al., 2023)



Video Game Features Encourage Youth Overengagement and Spending



Features that encourage overengagement:

- **Free-to-play (F2P):** Games with no upfront cost that often use engagement maximization and in-app purchases to generate profit
- **Season passes:** Modern game subscriptions that roll out content slowly, encouraging players to keep playing so their initial purchase doesn't feel "wasted"



Features that encourage overspending:

- **Loot boxes:** Randomized reward packs purchased with real or virtual currency, introducing gambling-like mechanics to game play
- **Microtransactions:** Small, easily repeatable in-game purchases incentivize impulse buying and normalize constant spending during play, obscuring total amount spent
- **Pay-to-win (P2W):** Game design in which paid items give players a direct advantage, which creates social and competitive pressure to continuously spend real money

The High-Risk Zone In-Game Chat and Lobbies



Today's online multiplayer games often feature in-game voice chat and "lobbies" (waiting spaces in games where mixed-age players can talk to each other via voice or text). These features are often "on by default" even when players are registered as youth.

Many youth are exposed to toxic behavior in these spaces as a routine part of online play, though there is wide variation in beliefs about what constitutes toxic behavior.

Anonymous and unmoderated chat with mixed-age players in these spaces are associated with exposure to:

- Cyberbullying
- Harassment
- Sexual harassment
- Slurs/hate speech
- "Severe" abuse, including stalking, doxxing, and violent threats
- Toxic behavior with more negative impacts for girls' mental well-being and self-esteem

(Antidefamation League, 2022; Hu et al., 2025; Hygen et al., 2025; Kowert & Woodwell, 2022; Kwak et al., 2015)

When Does a Video Gaming Habit Become Problematic?



Gaming disorder is defined as a persistent pattern of gaming (online or offline) lasting at least 12 months that leads to significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, or occupational functioning.

Red flags include:

- Gaming replacing sleep, school, or social life
- Difficulty reducing gaming time
- Irritability when not gaming
- Continued play despite problems

Risk factors: Family conflict, low socioeconomic status, depression in parents, intrusive parenting, loneliness, social anxiety, purchase of loot boxes in game

Protective influences: Parental awareness of video gaming time spent and activities, positive parenting, having positive self-worth tied to other aspects of life

(Darvesh et al., 2020; Ide et al., 2021; Mun & Lee, 2021; Petrescu et al., 2025; Yue et al., 2026)

