

Raising Safe & Healthy Teens

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Help guide teens as they face the challenges of:

- Substance Use
- Stress / Mental Health
- Healthy Dating Relationships



Parents and caring adults are the best support.

CONNECTIONS

For teens, there are connections among substance use, mental health, and healthy dating relationships. Challenges in one area may lead to impacts in another.

The middle and high school years are when teens explore new interests, make new friends, and try new activities. They are also when teens begin defining who they are and what their place is in the world. It is both an exciting and challenging time, full of uncertainty with plenty of ups and downs.

Data from Arlington students shows that many of our young people are dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression and that some are in unhealthy relationships. Some teens turn to drugs, alcohol, or other unhealthy coping mechanisms in an effort to feel better.

Many young people are able to successfully navigate the challenges that come with the teenage years, learning from mistakes, growing and maturing, while others struggle.

What You Should Know

- Teens who suffer from mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety are more likely to use drugs or alcohol.
- Adolescents who experience teen dating violence are more likely to have thoughts of/attempt suicide, be depressed, or use alcohol and other substances.
- Depression is a common effect of using certain drugs and drinking alcohol; continued use can deepen into a disorder.



What Are Arlington Teens Experiencing?

In Spring 2017, the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families surveyed middle and high school students using the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The results may surprise you.*

Stress / Mental Health

- 70% of Arlington teens report feeling stressed by school often or very often.
- The percentage of youth who reported feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks during the past year has increased across all grade levels since 2013; the biggest increase was among 12th graders – from 29% in 2013 to 37% in 2017.
- 13% of 8th-12th graders who report depression drank alcohol three or more days in the past 30 days.

Healthy Dating Relationships

- Nearly 50% of APS female students in grades 8, 10, and 12 report having been sexually harassed at school.
- 25% of female students in grades 8, 10, and 12 indicate that someone they went out with put them down or called them names; 20% indicated a dating partner made unwanted sexual contact with them.
- Of the 8th-12th graders who experienced physical violence in a relationship, more than half – 59% – report depressive symptoms.

Substance Use

- Since 2013, more students in grades 6, 8, and 10 are using over-the-counter medication to get high. The biggest increase was among 6th graders – from 2% in 2013 to 11% in 2017, equaling use by high school students.
- Use of marijuana by high school students within the past 30 days has increased since 2013. Most notable is use by 12th graders, which went from 22% four years ago to 27% now.
- Improper use of prescription drugs has increased since 2013, most notably among 6th and 12th graders. Sixth graders report taking pain medication not prescribed for them; 12th graders report using Xanax and Adderall not prescribed for them.

*Full results of the YRBS can be found at: www.apcyf.org.

Know the Signs

The good news is that caring parents and adults can be a positive influence and can help prevent and/or reduce unhealthy behaviors in teens.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between typical teenage moodiness or angst and the signs of stress/mental health issues, substance use, or being in an unhealthy dating relationship. If your teenager exhibits any of the following, pay attention and take action if the behavior is prolonged or appears to worsen.

Changes in Personality or Behavior

- Lack of interest in school, sports or other activities that used to be important
- Withdrawal, isolation from family or friends
- Sudden drop-off in grades
- Emotional changes – feeling sad, fearful, irritable, or argumentative
- Changes in sleep habits

Changes in Physical Health

- Lack of energy and motivation
- Change in eating habits
- Excessive exercising
- Multiple headaches and stomach aches
- Neglected appearance – lack of interest in clothing, grooming, or looks

What You Can Do

Start by taking time to talk. A strong, close relationship with parents and other trusted adults is a powerful way to help young people make safe, healthy choices.

It is never too late to strengthen relationships and open up the lines of communication. Try these tips.

- Make time to talk
- Listen – without judgment
- Ask open-ended questions to understand more
- Recognize and validate feelings
- Discuss expectations and boundaries
- Remain calm, regardless of what your teen tells you
- Support one another

Additional ideas for having conversations with your teen about difficult topics can be found at: www.apcyf.org. For more information and resources, see the next panel.

Where to Get Help

Arlington cares ... and has the resources to help teens and families find the support they need.

EMERGENCY HOTLINES

Arlington DHS Emergency Services • 703-228-5160

Crisis Link Regional Hotline • 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or 703-527-4077
• Text CONNECT to 85511

Children's Regional Crisis Response • 1-844-N-Crisis (844-627-4747)

National Hope Line • 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

LGBTQ Lifeline • 1-866-488-7386

Crisis Text Line • Text HOME to 741741

Doorways Sexual and Domestic Violence Hotline • 703-237-0881

OTHER USEFUL LINKS

Mental Health

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) • www.nami.org

- 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

SAMHSA Suicide Prevention Lifeline • www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

SMYAL (Regional LGBTQ Youth Suicide Prevention and Support)

- www.smyal.org • 202-546-5940

Arlington Children's Behavioral Healthcare Services • 703-228-1560

Substance Use

Second Chance • www.secondchancearlington.org/ • 571-206-8085

Arlington Public Schools Substance Abuse Counselors

- <https://www.apsva.us/office-of-student-services/substance-abuse-counselors/>
- 703-228-6061

Healthy Dating Relationships

Project PEACE • <http://health.arlingtonva.us/project-peace/dating-abuse>

- 703-228-1678

Promoting Awareness | Victim Empowerment (PAVE)

- www.shatteringthesilence.org • 1-877-399-1346

Additional Resources

Arlington Public Schools

- <https://www.apsva.us/counselors/>
- <https://www.apsva.us/mental-health-services/>
- <https://www.apsva.us/office-of-student-services/psychological-services/>
- 703-228-6005 (for general information)

Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families

- www.apcyf.org • 703-228-1667

Helping parents/guardians guide teens as they face the challenges of substance use, stress/mental health, and healthy dating relationships



www.secondchancearlington.org



<http://health.arlingtonva.us/project-peace/dating-abuse>



www.apcyf.org



www.READYcoalition.org



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