

Stress vs. Anxiety: How to Support our Youth

The words “stress” and “anxiety” are often used interchangeably. Differentiating between stress and anxiety can be difficult because they share many of the same emotional and physical symptoms. Both stress and anxiety can lead to uneasiness, loss of sleep, headaches, stomachaches and inability to focus or concentrate. Despite the similarities, there are key differences between stress and anxiety. In order to help children and adolescents cope with stress and anxiety, we must understand these differences in an effort to provide appropriate supports.



Stress and anxiety are affecting our students at a growing rate. A study from the American Psychological Association found that U.S. teens are even more stressed than adults. Likewise, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America cites that 25.1% of children between 13 and 18 years old suffer from anxiety disorders. It is normal to feel stress and anxiety throughout each stage of life. In fact, some stress and anxiety can be positive. For example, stress can provide the energy to tackle a big test or to complete a presentation. Similarly, anxiety can ignite our flight or fight response and help us survive in dangerous situations. But, if stress and anxiety are not well managed, it can start to interfere in normal day to day activities and impair an individual’s ability to function.

According to the American Psychological Association, stress can be described as a feeling of being overwhelmed, worried or run down. Stress is the bodies’ response to any demand. It should be noted that how we interpret life’s demands plays a role in the level of stress we experience. Stress almost always comes with an identifiable cause. If a student is feeling overwhelmed by the pressures of school workloads, over scheduling or a conflict with a peer, they are most likely experiencing stress. Generally, stress is a reaction to an external cause and subsides once the situation has been resolved. Compared to anxiety, stress is an experience that is more common and manageable as we tend to react to stress by diving into what is causing the stress and dealing with it. A key to managing stress is to find ways to cope that are positive versus self-destructive. Some positive strategies and skills we can help build with our youth include:

- Time management
- Goal setting
- Avoid procrastination
- Problem solving
- Set realistic expectations- recognize we all have limits
- Practice self-care (good nutrition, exercise and plenty of sleep)
- Make time to relax
- Seek support from friends and family

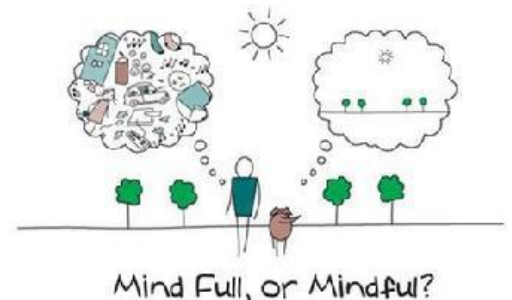
Anxiety can manifest as a normal reaction to stress and can be described as a feeling of unease, worry or fear, often about something with an uncertain outcome. Some fear and anxiety are a normal part of development. It is not uncommon for a child or teenager to feel anxious about starting a new school, going on a first date or preparing for a major exam. Normal anxiety only lasts for a short time, does not specifically interfere in a person’s wellbeing and does not prevent a person from engaging in day to day activities. As anxiety intensifies, it may lead to a sense of helplessness. Abnormal anxiety is more

persistent, it is excessive and may be out of proportion to the concern. In other words, the worry is greater than that experienced by most people. For example, a child who is nervous about going to a birthday party may exhibit normal levels of anxiety with a few tears and some reluctance of leaving the familiarity of their parent, but they eventually recover and are able to enjoy themselves. In contrast, a child who exhibits abnormal levels of anxiety may hysterically cry in terror at the thought of entering the party, become physically and emotionally distressed and refuse to go. As illustrated by this example, anxiety becomes a concern not based on what a child is worrying about, but rather how that worry is impacting a child's functioning. Anxiety can become problematic for a child or adolescent when worry and avoidance become automatic responses, preventing them from participating in daily school activities, friendships and academic performance. Some signs of concern that may trigger a red flag that a youth may be suffering from high levels of anxiety include:

- Demonstrating excessive distress out of proportion to the situation
- Demonstrating excessive avoidance (refusal to participate in activities or attend school)
- Disruptions in sleep (difficulty falling asleep, difficulty sleeping alone, frequent nightmares)
- Headaches, stomachaches, regular complaints of feeling sick
- Seeking excessive reassurance that things will be "okay"
- Easily frustrated, agitated or distressed in a stressful situation
- Worrying more days of the week than not (uncontrollable worry and fear)
- Requires excessive time coaxing to do normal activities (homework, hygiene, meals)

Understanding why anxiety feels the way it does is one of the greatest tools in managing it. When you can identify why you feel the way you do, it is easier to navigate your way around those feelings. One of the first steps in treating anxiety is seeking help from a trained mental health professional. A trained mental health provider can properly diagnose and provide treatment recommendations. Learning constructive strategies to cope with anxiety can help youth gain better control over thoughts and emotions. While treatment may include a combination of therapy and medication, there are things adults can do to support youth who may be struggling with excessive levels of anxiety:

- Listen and acknowledge feelings- this sends a message that you care.
- Be sensitive to the fact that he/she has genuine worries and fears but try to not enable his or her avoidance behavior.
- Be patient—coping with anxiety isn't as easy as just "snapping out of it".
- Educate yourself about anxiety disorders
- Teach mindfulness- found to reduce symptoms of anxiety
 - Anxiety is driven by a brain that has been cast into the future, mindfulness helps train the brain to stay in the present.



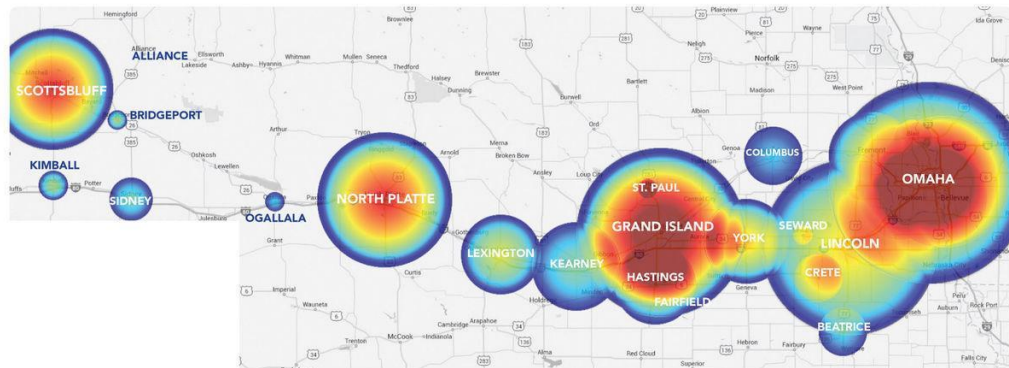
References: American Psychological Association; Anxiety and Depression Association of America; National Institute on Mental Health; National Association of School Psychologist

Sex Trafficking: A Hidden Crime

Human Trafficking is a hidden crime that impacts vulnerable individuals, including children, throughout the state. One of the most common types of human trafficking is sex trafficking. In Nebraska, 900 individuals are sold for sex each month (Women's Fund of Omaha). Though most of the activity occurs along I-80, sex trafficking can happen in any community to anyone. In 2017, there were 25,000 runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Endangered Children and 1 in 7 of those are likely victims of sex trafficking (Nebraska Attorney General).

U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines human trafficking as "modern day slavery that involved the use of force, fraud or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act." A commercial sex act includes prostitution, pornography or another type of sexual act in exchange for goods, like money, drugs or shelter (Shared Hope International). Human trafficking victims are exploited by the trafficker to earn money from buyers. There are several different ways victims are trafficked including sex trafficking, forced labor, including child labor, child soldiers and child sex tourism, in which a person travels to another country where the law enforcement is weak to have sex with a child. The average age children enter sex trafficking is 14-16 (Shared Hope International). In a report from Creighton University's Human Trafficking Initiative, it is estimated that 1 in 5 individuals sold for sex in Nebraska are sold multiple times and in multiple markets throughout the state.

It is very challenging to identify sex traffickers because they often appear to be someone they are not. Traffickers may appear to be friends with the victim or taking on the role of the caregiver. Traffickers may also be parents or family members of the victim. They often find ways to lure victims in by taking advantage of vulnerabilities and isolating victims from loved ones. Traffickers may use manipulation to lure vulnerable people by promising affection or something that the victim needs, like shelter. Traffickers also use force by violence or stealing immigration paperwork and other forms of identification. They often find victims online, at the mall, parties or other public places or within their own family or friends circle.



Women's Fund of Omaha, 2017

Warning Signs that a student is being trafficked:

- Unusual tattoos
- Unexplained absences
- Suddenly owns expensive items or has a large amount of cash
- Multiple cellphones
- Disconnected from family, friends and activities they once enjoyed
- Sudden changes in behaviors
- Appears to be coached or provides scripted responses to questions
- Appears deprived of food, water, sleep or medical care

School Community Intervention and Prevention

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SCIP is funded in part by: Lincoln Public Schools, United Way of Lincoln/Lancaster County, Region V Systems, Nebraska DHHS: Division of Behavioral Health and Region 4 Behavioral Health System

What can parents do?

- Monitor online activity including social media activity
- Keep social media pages private
- Talk to youth about the dangers of talking to strangers in person or online. Emphasize that people are not always who they seem to be online.
- Talk to youth about consent
- Encourage youth to stay in groups when at the mall or other public places
- Report anything suspicious to the National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

Sex trafficking can be prevented by being aware of the signs and reporting suspicious activity. The Nebraska Attorney General's office put together a task force that trained over 1000 law enforcement officers and other service providers to help prevent sex trafficking. The Attorney General's office also offers presentations for parents and youth that may be requested. The Set Me Free Project is a nonprofit organization that was formed to educate the community and work to combat sex trafficking. Their President, Stephanie Olson, will be presenting at a community awareness event on February 28th at Scott Middle School. For other resources and additional information of how Nebraska is working to prevent Sex Trafficking, please view the list below:

Resources and references:

Human Trafficking Data (Nebraska): <http://www.omahawomensfund.org/wp-content/uploads/Nebraskas-Commercial-Sex-Market-Report-FINAL.pdf>

<https://sharedhope.org/the-problem/what-is-sex-trafficking/>

<https://ago.nebraska.gov/combating-human-trafficking>

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/nebraska>

<https://www.setmefreeproject.net/>

<https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/what-human-trafficking>

WARNING

K2 Back in the National Headlines Over the Summer



The U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a [warning statement](#) on July 19, 2018 about serious health complications, mostly in the Midwest, caused by the use of K2 or Spice (synthetic cannabinoid products) laced with brodifacoum, which is a blood-thinning compound commonly used in rat poison.

It's been reported that hundreds of users of this synthetic drug have been treated for complications such as bleeding, and several people have died. It should be noted that brodifacoum remains in the body for weeks and may cause serious complications with bleeding weeks later. Those who use K2 and experience symptoms like easy bruising, bleeding gums, nosebleeds, internal bleeding and/or other bleeding problems should seek medical attention for possible consumption of brodifacoum.

In mid-August (2018), the Governor of Connecticut, along with the state Department of Public Health (DPH) and Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, [issued a public warning statement](#) about K2 as there were almost 100 reported cases of K2 overdoses within a 24 hour time period in the New Haven, CT area. Some of the individuals tested positive for fentanyl exposure but most did not so what chemical in the K2 individuals in the area used is still unknown.

Despite all of these facts and recent happenings, many believe that synthetic cannabinoids are safe and a legal alternative to marijuana, which is not the case.

I would like to review what K2 is and why it is harmful.

K2 or Spice is a mixture of herbs, spices or chopped up plant material that is sprayed with synthetic compounds that are chemically similar to THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana.

K2 is typically sold in small, plastic bags of dried leaves and marketed as incense or potpourri that can be smoked. These products are generally sold in head shops and gas stations. It is also readily available for anyone to order and purchase online. And while law makers actively work on banning K2 in its most current form, the makers of the drug change the chemical compounds just enough to keep ahead of the laws.

K2 is generally smoked in joints or pipes, but is also known to be consumed as a tea. K2 is also sold in liquid form and used in vaping pens, vaping pipes and e-cigarettes.

Side effects associated with K2:

- Agitation
- Pale skin
- Seizures
- Vomiting
- Profuse sweating
- Uncontrolled/spastic body movements
- Elevated blood pressure, heart rate and palpitations
- Difficulty speaking
- Severe paranoia
- Delusions and hallucinations
- Death

The effects of K2 occur within minutes of use and last from one to eight hours.

For more information about synthetic cannabinoids:

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/synthetic-cannabinoids-k2spice>



<https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/emerging-trends-alerts>

www.chicagotribune.com/.../ct-met-synthetic-marijuana-problems-history-20180406

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/dead-100-severe-bleeding-synthetic-pot-illinois.../story>

<https://drugfree.org/drug/k2-spice-synthetic-marijuana>