



Opioid
Response
Network
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Middle Schools and COVID-19: Guidance for Addressing Resilience and Substance Use *Opioid Response Network (ORN)*

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Introduction

- The purpose of this guide is to provide schools operating remotely with actionable suggestions to protect and strengthen student resilience by:
 - Increasing protective factors such as connection to school, connection to parents/caregivers, connection to positive peers, connection to culture, connection to helpful services, involvement in activities/employment and community service, positive coping strategies and healthy lifestyle choices (including sleep, nutrition, and physical activity)
 - Reducing risk factors such as unmet family needs (housing, food and financial resources), social isolation, anxiety and depression, exposure to domestic violence, harsh discipline, and availability of risky substances
 - Educating students and families about substance use prevention through diverse channels
 - Connecting students and families to available resources (local and national)
- In addition to challenges such as increased anxiety, depression, suicidality and domestic violence, our youth are at risk of increased substance use and harms associated with living with caregivers who are misusing alcohol and other substances. Substance misuse can cause immediate harms such as:
 - Suicide: 25-30% of all deaths by suicide involve alcohol¹
 - Domestic violence: more than 50% of incidents involve drinking²
 - Overdose death or poisoning³
- Schools are uniquely positioned to help prevent and reduce risks and problems associated with the increased misuse of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, opioids and other drugs, including prescription medications.
- Schools understand that equity issues need to be addressed in all aspects of the response to this pandemic. The negative effects of substance misuse disproportionately harm students of color (including African-American and black, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and LatinX youth) as well as LGBTQ youth, youth living in poverty and/or experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, students with disabilities, students with mental health challenges, and youth with family members who misuse substances.
- Wellness Teams or a community collaborative can help schools plan and problem-solve how to strengthen support for student and family well-being during this difficult time. Consider inviting community partners to join if they are not yet a part of a team.
- Staff need to follow their districts and school protocols, adapting suggestions so that they are implemented according to those rules during this unprecedented time.

Self-Care

The first response in any crisis is to “put on your own oxygen mask” so that you are able to serve others in an effective and sustainable way: be kind to yourself; mistakes will happen because there is so much to learn, be creative and try new things, and breathe.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4119510/>

² https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/factsheets/ft_intimate.pdf

³ <https://files.constantcontact.com/a923b952701/dbf0b5a5-f730-4a6f-a786-47097f1eea78.pdf>



Parent/Caregiver Supports

1. **During Parent/Caregiver Check-ins**, ask questions about home safety:
 - If you have any guns at home, are they locked and safely stored away from children?
 - If you have any alcohol at home, is it stored in a safe place away from your children?
 - If you have any marijuana or cannabis at home, is it stored in a safe place away from your children?
 - What about prescription medications, such as opioid painkillers? Are they locked up or stored in a safe place where your children cannot take them?
 - If you have prescription opioids or if someone in the home uses opioids, do you have an overdose reversal available, like naloxone (Narcan)?
2. **Do Parent/Caregiver Check-Ins/Check-Outs**: The well-being of students is greatly influenced by the state of their parents/caregivers. Consider calling parents to build family connection, evaluate needs and risks, and provide helpful resources. (provide sample questions and survey)
 - Identify highest risk (Tier 2 and 3) students based on risk factors including known substance use behaviors, even if it is just a few families.
 - Develop a checklist to ask about basic needs (food, housing, money, and other resources), concerns about family mental health and substance use including childrens' mental health and substance use, family safety, social support, safe storage (guns, alcohol, medications, and marijuana) and availability of naloxone.
 - Enlist school counselors, nurses, administrators and other support staff to call selected families to find out how they are doing and what they might need.
 - Ask parents for permission to call students directly, requesting the student's cell phone number if they are comfortable giving it to you so that you can call or text the student (document verbal or written consent).
3. **Encourage Referrals to Behavioral Health Services with "Warm" Handoffs**: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major change in the way many behavioral health services are provided. The availability of tele-health services has reduced some barriers (such as transportation and ability to provide phone and online counseling) and increased others (such as confidentiality). When referring a parent or caregiver to services, consider making a "warm referral" by setting up a three-way call or video conference with the parent and the provider.
4. **Post Resource Lists on the District Website and Send an Email to Families**:
 - Include updated links to local, state and national sources of support
 - Include list of Crisis Hotlines for 24/7 help (see national list below)
 - Post school counselor/support staff contact information: staff photo and name, hours and methods of contact: email, phone, text, and how often school staff will check email or voicemail.
5. **Develop Brief Educational Videos for Families**: Personalized video messages from trusted school staff are a great way to educate students and parents/caregivers about important wellness topics while operating remotely. Consider creating and disseminating videos on a variety of key topics, including parenting skills, communication skills, dealing with emotions, building resilience, and stress management.
6. **Create Social Media Campaigns**: Work with a local prevention or community coalition to develop educational and inspiring messages and disseminate on channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or whatever channel(s) your community prefers (see Drug Free Communities of Dallas County Facebook page as an example).



Student Supports

- 1. Do Student Check-Ins, with a Priority on Students at Highest Risk (Tiers 2 and 3):** Ask about basic needs (food, housing, internet), sleep and wellness, daily routines, COVID-19 risk, mental health, suicidality, safety, peer supports/friends, worries about substance use of family members, friends and themselves.
- 2. Summer Activity Resources,** including fun and meaningful low risk (COVID-safer) activities such as:
 - Online: See [Teen Online Summer Activity Guide](#) for ideas and to post (add local activity options)
 - Community Service: Letters to elderly or sick, making food, building projects, and donating time and/or resources.
 - Cultural: Learning about culture, arts, crafts, traditional skills, and connecting to land and communities.
 - Educational: Language, creative writing, coding, book club, academics, science experiments.
 - Outdoor: Bicycling, walking, gardening, shooting hoops, and other ways to be outside.
 - Creative: Visual arts, dance, music, singing and poetry, mural, building, theatre, and other performing arts.
 - Family time: Encourage families to do things together, eating meals, watching media, playing games, and connecting to their culture through food, faith, stories, books and play.
- 3. Ask Students to Create Educational or Inspirational Videos:** Disseminate these brief videos through websites, classes and/or social media.
- 4. Convene Student Leadership Groups Online:** Ask for student ideas about how to help and connect with their peers.
- 5. Provide Specific Support for School Transitions:** From elementary to middle school and middle to high school, students still need support; use a variety of channels including digital and email messages, websites, social media, webinars and interactive discussions to address concerns, share tips, and prepare students for the upcoming changes.
- 6. Offer a Variety of Ways to Connect, 1:1 and Groups:** Start sessions with reminders about privacy and confidentiality so that students can think about what and how to share and create group agreements. Follow district protocols for allowed communication methods.
 - Phone: student's personal cell phone with parental permission or parent's phone
 - Text: convenient and often preferred mode of communication
 - Email: often the least engaging for students
 - Small groups with chat: psychoeducation may work better than therapy groups
 - Plus e-blasts, video messages, "office hours," structured and unstructured class meetings, and virtual celebrations.
- 7. Teach Brief SEL and Prevention Lessons:** See Second Step⁴, CASEL⁵, NIDA⁶, etc. for ideas:
 - As part of synchronous classes or asynchronous instruction
 - Research project to teach others about SEL skills and prevention
 - Modeling of coping/self-care strategies as part of instruction time (Box Breath, etc.)
- 8. Set up a Virtual Wellness Room:** Be creative; include resources on stress relief, mental health support, mindfulness, or nature live webcams to reduce stress and improve well-being. Examples: [Antioch Middle School Wellness Room](#), [Corona-Norco USD Virtual Calming Room](#)

⁴ <https://www.secondstep.org/covid19support>

⁵ <https://casel.org/covid-resources/>

⁶ https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/easy-use-resources-learning-about-drugs-and-addiction?utm_source=teenRSS&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=teen-Blog



Teachers/Staff Supports: A Culture of Care and Respect

1. **Encourage teachers to engage in self-care**
2. **Provide training for teachers about warning signs of substance use, family violence, suicide and other mental distress and encourage referrals**
3. **Help teachers connect with each other** through professional learning communities, sharing of curricula and strategies for engagement, and many different forms of appreciation
4. **Offer ways to informally connect with school staff such as a weekly “Coffee” with the Superintendent or Principal:** Some districts are inviting families to virtual meetings to receive updates and talk with school leadership as a way to communicate that schools want to stay connected.
5. **Offer multiple ways for staff, families and students to connect and promote supports:**
 - Website for mental health and well-being support with links and contact information
 - Links to and lists of resources in email signatures, food packages, educational packets, and as many ways as possible
 - Office hours/drop in
 - Calendar for students/families to make phone or online appointments with school staff
 - Clear and possibly expanded hours of availability

Attachments:

1. [Parent/Caregiver Check-In Questions](#)
2. [Teen Online Summer Activity Guide](#)
3. [School Resources to Support Resilience and Substance Use Prevention](#)
4. [Crisis Hotlines](#)



Supporting Child and Family Well-Being during COVID-19 Prompts and Questions for Parents/Caregivers

*It is helpful to remind parents/caregivers and children that you are there to help, not to judge them. If a parent/caregiver shares a concern, listen. Validate that this is a difficult time, everyone is struggling and that support is available. **Make sure you have a list of resources that you can share with families to support their needs before you reach out.***

1. Is now a good time to talk? If not, is there a better time?
2. Now is a difficult, stressful time for everyone. How are you? Are you okay and safe? Is there anything you need?
3. We all need **support** right now. Who are the supports in your life? Are you currently able to connect with them?
4. Since the COVID-19 emergency started, what has changed for your family? Has anything been more of a struggle? Are you facing new worries or needs?
 - How are you doing with **food**?
 - What about **housing and utilities**?
 - What about **internet access and computer**? Is your child able to take part in online school?
 - What about **income or work**? Do you need financial help?
5. What about your family's well-being at this time:
 - Are you or any family members feeling **depressed** in a way that makes it hard to take care of things?
 - Are you or any family members feeling so **anxious** that it is harming their health?
 - Are you or any family members feeling so badly that they **think about killing themselves**?
 - Have you noticed that you or any family member are **drinking more** or **having problems with substances** like marijuana, tobacco, opioids or prescription or over-the-counter medications now?
6. What about the **safety of your home**:
 - If you have any **guns** at home, are they locked and safely stored away from children?
 - If you have any **alcohol** at home, is it stored in a safe place away from your children?
 - If you have any **marijuana or cannabis** at home, is it stored in a safe place away from your children?
 - What about **prescription medications, such as opioid painkillers (including hydrocodone and codeine)**? Are they locked up or stored in a safe place where your children cannot take them?
 - If you have prescription opioids or if someone in the home uses opioids, do you have **naloxone (a nasal spray like Narcan) to reverse overdose**?
7. During times like these, we know connection is important. Have you tried any of these ways of **connecting with your child(ren)** during this time?
 - Sharing meals together?
 - Doing activities together: cooking, walking, card/board games, learning something new
 - Talking with your child(ren) about how they are feeling?
 - Talking about important things like healthy relationships, coping with feelings or substance use?
8. How are you feeling about **summer planning** for your family? Do you feel ready for the summer? Any activities for your child(ren) planned? (offer a list of virtual and outside activities)
9. Do you need **any help** connecting to _____? I'd be happy to help you call _____ to get you started if that would be helpful.

Adapted from the New Hampshire Children's Trust 2020 for the *Opioid Response Network*, May 2020



National Crisis Response Resources for Youth and Families

Call 911 immediately if you're concerned that you or someone you know is unsafe, may be in danger of self-harm or may be suicidal or overdosing. Tell responders as many details as possible so they can be prepared when they arrive.

- **Crisis Text Line** – Text “HOME” to 741741
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – 1-800-273-8255 <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline** – 1-800-656-4673 <https://www.rainn.org/>
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline** - 1-800-799- 7233 <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- **The Trevor Project for LGBTQ+ youth** – 1-866-488-7386 <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- **Trans Lifeline** – 1-877-565-8860 <https://www.translifeline.org>
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline**, Treatment Referral and Information- 1-800-662-HELP (4357) <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

School Resources to Support Student Resilience and Substance Use Prevention

(updated and available on the [ORN COVID-19 public health web page](#))

<i>Focus</i>	<i>Title and Link</i>	<i>Description</i>
Child Abuse	Responding to Child Abuse During a Pandemic, 25 Tips for Multi-Disciplinary Teams	PDF: This guide by the Zero Abuse Initiative provides practical tips for addressing child abuse that can be adapted to educational settings.
Child Abuse	Coronavirus Tips & Resources for Parents, Children, Educators & Others	Website: Prevent Child Abuse America's website has an extensive list of tips and linked resources for educators, parents, children, home visitors and others about how to stay connected and support children.
Child Abuse	Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse Considerations During COVID-19	PDF: This article by SAMHSA explains how children are at increased risk for abuse during COVID-19. Includes national resources to help families.



Homelessness and Youth	COVID-19 and Homelessness: Strategies for Schools, Early Learning Programs, and Higher Education Institutions	Website: SchoolHouse Connection's extensive guide to updated resources and strategies on helping youth experiencing homelessness who are especially vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 includes recommendations for education, services, and economics.
LGBTQ Students	Supporting LGBTQ Students during the Coronavirus Quarantine: A Tip-Sheet for School Counselors	PDF: This tip sheet by the Human Rights Campaign and ASCA suggests specific ways to help school staff support LGBTQ students.
LGBTQ Students	The Trevor Project Releases New Report on Implications of Covid-19 on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health Citation: Green, A.E., Price-Feeney, M. & Dorison, S.H. (2020). Implications of COVID-19 for LGBTQ Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. New York, New York: The Trevor Project.	Report: This report by The Trevor Project outlines how physical distancing, economic strain, and increased anxiety may impact LGBTQ youth and explains how to support LGBTQ youth.
LGBTQ Students	A Resource for School Counselors on Supporting LGBTQ Youth During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Post: This blog post from the Human Rights Campaign highlights challenges of LGBTQ students isolated in unsupportive environments and how school staff can support these students.
Mental Health	Statewide Webinar Addresses Mental Health Needs of Students and Staff during COVID-19 Download Slides	Webinar and Slides: This webinar by the Education Development Center describes impacts of COVID-19 on student mental health and specific recommendations for schools, including planning for return to school and mental health self-care.
Parent Education for Substance Use Prevention	Guiding Good Choices (GCC) Groups Online	Webinar: Communities That Care will share how to move GCC online; GCC teaches parents of middle school children skills needed to reduce children's risk for using alcohol and other drugs.
Parent Support	Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis	PDF (English and Spanish): This article by the Child Mind Institute provides suggestions to parents of teens about how to communicate about physical distancing, support connection, remote schooling, healthy habits and mindfulness.



Parent Support	Supporting Families During COVID-19	Website: The Child Mind Institute has multiple and updated resources in English and Spanish to help families cope including a tip sheet, Helping Parents through COVID-19.
Parent Support	COVID-19: We are Here For You Online Support Community for Parents and Caregivers	Website: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids' website resources include text messaging service, online support groups, and links for addiction support.
School Counseling	School Counseling During COVID-19: Online Lessons and Resources	Website: American School Counseling Association's website has a list of lessons and resources to support social and emotional learning..
School Counseling	Webinar Educational Resources for Virtual School Counseling Slides	Webinar and Slides: This webinar created by two state school counselor associations (CASC and WSCA) has links to resources to help counselors work virtually, including ethical standards, suicide risk, staff and parent support, and communication strategies.
School Counseling	American School Counseling Webinar series	Webinar: American School Counseling Association is providing free access to professional development on best practices for working with students and families virtually.
School Counseling	New Jersey School Counselor Association COVID-19 Resources	Website: Extensive list of school counseling websites with resources on wide range of topics.
School Counseling	Counseling Resources	Website: Created by the COVID-19 School Counseling Emergency Task Force volunteers, provides key educational and counseling resources to support students by level (elementary, middle and high school); includes mental health resources
Social and Emotional Needs	Educator's Guide to Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Students	PDF: This guide by the Michigan DOE and DHHS has information and strategies for educators and for families, including recommendations for helping students at highest risk such as families affected by substance use.



Social and Emotional Learning	COVID Response Resources for Educators and Families: Second Step	Website: Committee for Children’s website includes online SEL lessons, middle school remote learning advisory guide. and related webinars.
Special Needs	Helping Educators Through COVID-19 and Beyond.pdf	PDF: Child Mind Institute resource list includes links to tools for educator self-care, supporting anxious students, and dealing with grief and trauma; focus on children with learning disorders.
Staff Self-Care	Finding Your Rhythm	Post: Association of Middle Level Education’s post includes ideas to help educators practice self-care while working with students from home.
Student Mental Health	COVID-19 Resources University of Maryland School of Medicine	Website: National Center for School Mental Health’s website includes webinar and links to many resources on tele-mental health, crisis response and children’s behavioral health needs
Student Mental Health	Summary of Student Mental Health Survey Results	PDF: Report of results of a youth-led survey by the Youth Liberty Squad (founded by ACLU of Southern California) about how the COVID-19 crisis impacting student mental health; includes a student letter to the governor.
Youth Substance Use: General	Partnership for Drug-Free Kids: Covid-19: We are Here for You	Website: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids website includes resources for families with children or loved ones who have substance use disorders including text messaging, online groups and links.
Youth Substance Use: Alcohol	Is Alcohol Use Spiking in Your Home?	Article: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids provides results of their research on changes in alcohol use with COVID-19, focusing on how parents can help children and themselves with alcohol problems.
Youth Substance Use: Marijuana	COVID-19 and Marijuana: What You Need to Know	Post: Smart Approaches to Marijuana’s article on increased vulnerability to the virus for individuals who vape or smoke marijuana.



Youth Substance Use: Opioids	COVID-19: Accessing Critical Medications for Your Loved One	Post: Ideas for people who have a child or loved one using MAT to treat an Opioid Use Disorder to ensure treatment can be continued.
Youth Substance use: Vaping	Vaping and COVID-19: A toxic blend? - Boston Children's Discoveries	Article: This article discusses potential risks of teen vaping and COVID-19, including risks of infection and complications, and encourages quitting.
Youth Substance Use: Vaping	CATCH Health at Home: At-Home and Distance Learning Resources for Parents and Educators: Vaping, Lung Health and Infectious Diseases	Google Classroom: Access to CATCH's evidence-based health, nutrition, and physical education materials, including lesson on vaping.

Footnotes: Titles – hyperlink to website

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4119510/>

Kaplan, Mark S et al. "Use of Alcohol Before Suicide in the United States." Annals of Epidemiology, 2014

² https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/factsheets/ft_intimate.pdf

Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol Fact Sheet, World Health Organization

³ <https://files.constantcontact.com/a923b952701/dbf0b5a5-f730-4a6f-a786-47097f1eea78.pdf>

[The Consequences of COVID-19 on the Overdose Epidemic, Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program, May 2020](#)

⁴ <https://www.secondstep.org/covid19support>

Second Step COVID-19 Response: Resources for Parents and Families

⁵ <https://casel.org/covid-resources/>

CASEL CARES: SEL Resources During COVID-19

⁶ https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/easy-use-resources-learning-about-drugs-and-addiction?utm_source=teenRSS&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=teen-Blog

NIDA for Teens: Easy to Use Resources for Learning About Drugs and Addiction