

Helping Hand

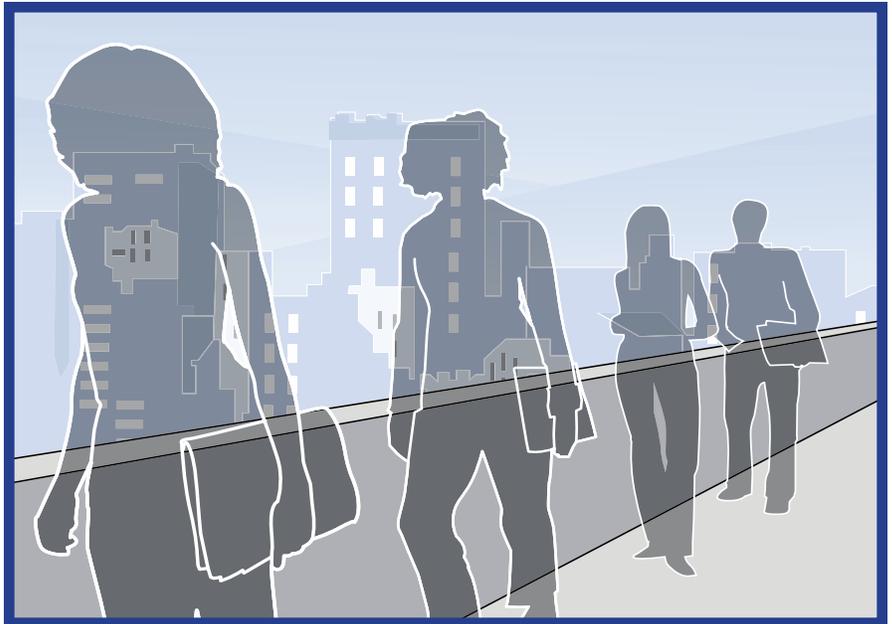
Volume 20, Issue 4

Meth: Is it Still At “Epidemic” Proportions?

Methamphetamine abuse among students has shown a general decline since the years 2004-2006, when major newspapers and magazines began featuring articles concerning the alarming growth in methamphetamine use, often referring to the problem as an “epidemic.”

According to an updated national survey of 8th-, 10th, and 12th-graders released by the University of Michigan this year (*Monitoring the Future*), 2.3 percent of 8th-graders, 2.4 percent of 10th-graders, and 2.8 percent of 12th-graders have used methamphetamine in their lifetime.

Methamphetamine is highly addictive and has many negative physical and mental health consequences, including extreme weight loss, severe dental problems, mood disturbances, and violent behavior. Chronic use often leads to crime, violence and criminal incarceration. Transmission of HIV and hepatitis B and C can be life-long consequences of methamphetamine abuse.



Early education and continual conversation remain the key tools in preventing use of this deadly drug. Following are a few ideas to begin a conversation with children.

Ask children:

What is methamphetamine? What do you know about how meth affects the body and brain? What is the source of your information? How can you determine if your source is reliable?

For teenagers:

Why is it especially important today that teens understand the risks of using methamphetamine? What are the risks to users? What happens in the brain when a person takes methamphetamine?

Conclude by asking children whether they think young people and adults in their community understand the risks of methamphetamine. Have them brainstorm ways of getting these messages across. If possible, put some of the best suggestions into action.

Sources: *Scholastic* and the Scientists of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Gangs Making Comeback

Following a marked decline from the mid-1990s to the early 2000's, there has been a steady resurgence of gang problems and associated violence in recent years. The incidence of gang activity in schools has again increased as well. In past years, gangs were more likely to be reported in urban schools than in suburban schools, and in public schools rather than private schools. That trend has turned - rural areas have seen a 65% explosion in the number of identified gangs, with smaller cities reporting 40% growth. Students attending schools with gang activity report witnessing delinquent behavior and criminal activity.

For additional information about youth gangs:

- Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse - 1-800-851-3420
- National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) - 1-800-446-0912
- Just Think Twice - <http://www.justthinktwice.com/> A special guide for teachers is available for download - http://www.justthinktwice.com/pdf/just_think_twice_guide_hi.pdf

Sources: *The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and The National Institute on Drug Abuse.*

Your Child's Behavioral Health: What's Up, Doc?

If you are reading these words, you are probably an adult who cares deeply about the life and health of a child. Sometimes it becomes difficult to know the best way to love and guide your child. You may notice behaviors in your child that puzzle, annoy, or even frighten you. Some of these are the normal stages of growth and development. If you want to learn more about your child's mental health, keep reading.

It's easy for parents to recognize when a child has a high fever. A child's mental health problem may be more difficult to identify. Mental health problems can't always be seen. However, the symptoms can be recognized.

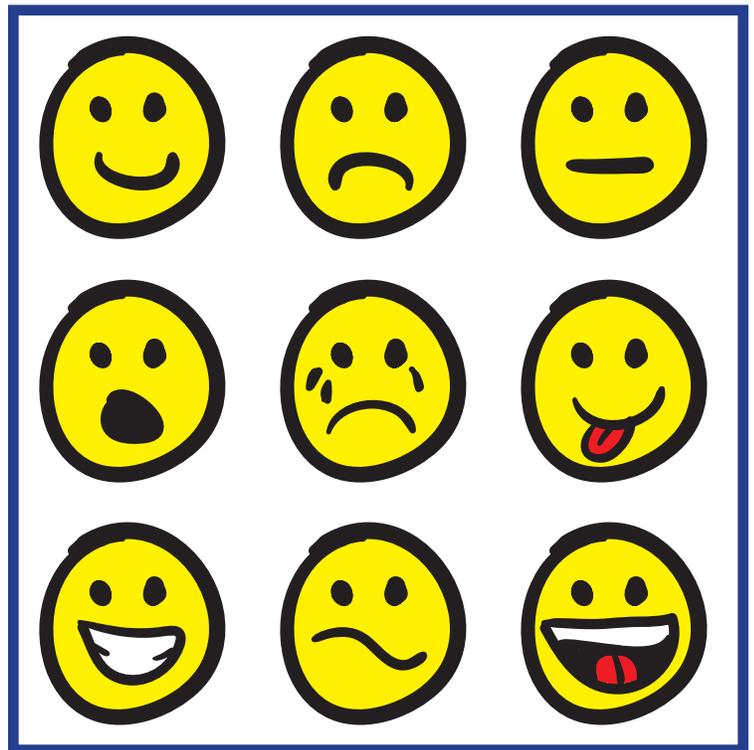
Mental health problems can be diagnosed because mental health professionals have studied and documented the symptoms. Your doctor, pediatrician or school can refer you to a mental health specialist. Some of the problems that affect children are depression, anxiety, conduct, eating, and attention

deficit/
hyperactivity
disorders.

Mental health problems affect one in every five young people at any given time. Tragically, an estimated

two-thirds of all young people with mental health problems are not getting the help they need. Without help, mental health problems can lead to school failure, alcohol or other drug abuse, family discord, violence, or even suicide.

It is important that you keep looking until you find the right services for your child. Be assured that help and resources are available – Start by talking to your child's pediatrician and/or his or her school guidance counselor.



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Graphic Designer: Lisa LaGrou
Publisher: Jane Adams

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Confronting Gang Violence

Gang involvement and violence is again on the rise following a marked decline from the early 1960s to the mid-1990s. Gang activity in schools has again increased as well. Generally, gangs are more likely to be reported in urban schools than in suburban schools, and in public schools rather than private schools. However, gang activity has risen much more quickly in rural and suburban communities recently. A majority of students report that the gangs they see in schools are involved in delinquent behavior and criminal activity.

Youth who join gangs do so for a variety of different reasons. Association with delinquent peers is one of the strongest predictors of gang membership. Individual factors also include early antisocial behavior, alienation, and rebelliousness. Research indicates that youth involved in gangs are less committed to school and education, and frequently lack caring family environments. Community factors such as poverty and low employment also play a role.

Tips for Parents

Youth gang involvement is preventable:

- Become aware of gang warning signs, such as graffiti, tattoos, unusual symbols, and language.
- Set firm guidelines and clear expectations for your child.
- Get to know your child's friends and acquaintances.
- Help your child to develop a strong sense of self-esteem.
- Report gang-related activity to the proper authorities and to the parents whose children may be involved.
- Look for any suspicious changes in behavior, such as truancy or carrying a weapon.
- Stress the importance of education.
- Become involved in community responses to gang activity.
- Help develop positive alternatives, such as after-school and weekend activities.

Using Your Child's Gifts in the Classroom

Raising a gifted child can be both exciting and challenging. Gifted children may develop cognitively at a faster rate than they do physically or emotionally. Parenting a gifted child means understanding their unique development and providing them with extra attention and supports.

The following are some tips to help parents understand their gifted child's unique development and help them create enriching environments at home and in school.

- A primary parental role is to make sure his/her child has access to an optimal learning environment.
- Responsible parents respectfully reach out to the school, research what is currently available, accurately represent their child's characteristics and behaviors (as well as any changes in expressed attitude to classroom learning), and ask how they can support their child at home.
- Outstanding parents recognize that everything isn't always perfect, but they model positive problem-solving behavior. They don't tear down the school; instead, they appreciate when their child is happy and excited about learning.
- Does your child recognize the importance of good manners in school? Help your child become a non-adversarial advocate for his/her learning needs, rather than succumbing to boredom or disruptive behaviors.
- Research shows that plentiful conversations between parents and children – talking over ideas – are an essential component of home environments that foster success. What are good topics? Think about areas of interest (on the part of either parent or child). Isn't that when you are most involved in learning?
- Think balance in learning. There is a time for schoolwork and a time for learning about other aspects of life. As a role model, how do you show value for such activities as after school music, athletics, community service, and free time for exploring interest areas, playing games, or savoring the beauty of life?



For more information, please contact:

National Association for Gifted Children, (202) 785-4268, www.nagc.org

Teaching Trustworthiness

The first years of life are the trust-building years. As a parent, every time you respond to your child's needs, he or she is learning to trust you, making you the most important teacher your child will ever have. Children who learn to trust others will be able to build trustworthy characteristics in themselves. Here are some of the values you can model to your child and some strategies for teaching these traits:

- Tell the truth. When you can be counted on to be honest, your child will learn from your example.
- Follow the rules. This helps your child feel part of the community and its values.
- Keep promises. This will feed your child's sense of self-worth.
- Take only things that belong to you or ask for permission.
- Talk about problems and how to solve them. Let your child see you struggle and find a way through difficulty while modeling your family's values. This will give him or her confidence that he or she can solve problems as an adult. Set an example. Never take without asking. Give back what you borrow.
- Establish consistent routines. Knowing what comes next helps children trust their environment and learn self-regulation.
- Watch TV shows and movies together. Talk about what happened to the characters. Use "teachable moments" in every day life to model how to solve problems.
- Read books about trustworthiness with your child. Discuss characters and situations.



Your child will not develop these characteristics overnight. He or she will need to observe these traits modeled consistently and have plenty of opportunities to practice before being able to consistently trust and be trusted.

For more information, contact: