

CDC Launches New Campaign to Address Youth Substance Use and Mental Health

Free Mind campaign addresses connections between substance use and mental health, risk factors that contribute to drug use and strategies to keep teens safe.

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The back-to-school season is a great time to engage with youth about mental health and substance use to promote their well-being throughout the academic year. To support these conversations, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has launched Free Mind, a new national campaign that provides youth ages 12–17 and their parents and caregivers with resources and information about substance use, mental health, and the connection between the two.

The drug overdose crisis is constantly evolving and remains an important public health issue. In 2024, more than 80,000 Americans died from a drug overdose. From 2020 to 2024, 75% of overdose deaths among youth ages 10–19 involved illegally made fentanyl. In addition, the number of teens reporting [poor mental health has increased](#) in the past decade. In 2023, 40% of high school students stopped regular activities because of persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and one in five students seriously considered attempting suicide.

“Teens may use alcohol and other substances to help them cope with stress, anxiety, and depression,” said Dr. Allison Arwady, Director of the CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. “Talking openly about mental health and substance use, and knowing when to get professional help, is critical to helping teens stay healthy. That’s why this campaign supports youth, parents, and caregivers in having those conversations early, before an issue arises.”

CDC spoke directly with youth about their knowledge and perceptions regarding substance use to develop messages, branding, and tactical strategies for Free Mind. The campaign seeks to resonate with this age group by addressing the connections between substance use and mental health, risk factors that contribute to drug use, and strategies to keep them safe. CDC also has created resources for parents and caregivers about the latest substance use and mental health challenges youth may face.

Visit [Free Mind: Mental Health & Drug Use Awareness for Teens | CDC](#) to learn more about the Free

Mind campaign. For more information about CDC's overdose prevention efforts, go to [Overdose Prevention | Overdose Prevention | CDC](#).

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