Caring Communities Raise Caring Kids

Look inside for resources on...
- Youth Mental Health
- Technology and Social Media
- Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth
- Prevention Resources
  and MUCH MORE!

YO U TH HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDE

TRI-TOWN COUNCIL
working together for kids

tritowncouncil.org
Dear Tri-Town Community Member,

Welcome to Tri-Town Council’s inaugural Youth Health and Safety Guide. Within this guide you will find resources to support healthy youth behaviors and habits, information about current youth trends and issues, youth substance use prevention information, tips for talking with teens about some of the “stuff” that matters, and why caring adults are a critical presence in the lives of young people.

Tri-Town Council has been serving Tri-Town youth and families for five decades and counting. We envision supporting a community where ALL youth have the relationships, supports and skills necessary to grow and develop into resilient, healthy, thriving adults. How? By intentionally strengthening the social and emotional well-being of Tri-Town youth, growing and fostering healthy behaviors, and preventing and reducing the “at risk” ones.

But this work takes ALL of us! Whether you are a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, neighbor, friend, twenty-something to one-hundred something, we ALL have a role to play in supporting our young people because caring communities raise caring kids. And in the words of author, motivational speaker and teen expert Josh Shipp... “All kids are one caring adult away from being a success story.”

May this guide support YOU in supporting YOUTH!

Warm Regards,
Tri-Town Council

P.S. We are grateful to our local organizations and businesses for supporting the production of this Youth Health and Safety Guide. Please be sure to peruse the advertising section beginning on page 18. We are especially grateful to our three towns, corporate and community foundations, organizations, and community members who support our work every day of the year! Thank-you!
Building youth Assets!

Repetition is important. Encourage. Listen, connect and communicate! Express care. Make every conversation a “win-win”

EVERYONE can build Assets!

Control your emotions. Observe. Share power. Provide support. Be a good role model.

Here are six simple principles to keep in mind when being an Asset Builder!

• EVERYONE can build Assets! It’s not just about great families or schools or neighborhoods. It’s about each person playing a role in the raising of “our” children.

• ALL young people need Assets! While it is crucial to pay special attention to youth who struggle — economically, emotionally or otherwise—nearly all young people need more Assets than they currently have.

• Relationships are KEY. Strong relationships between adults and young people, young people and their peers, and teenagers and children are central to Asset building.

• Asset building is ongoing. It starts when a child is born and continues through high school and beyond!

• Consistent messages are important. It’s critical for families, schools, communities, the media, and others to all give young people consistent messages about what is important and what is expected of them.

• Repetition is important. Young people need to experience the positive messages and opportunities of Asset building in all areas of their lives. Ideally, Asset building happens in families, is reflected in the community, and in other relationships children may have with a teacher, neighbor, or coach.

And finally…

Assets are intentional. Assets are about the everyday, often simple ways we adults can positively impact a young person’s life by giving them a smile, kind word, and letting them know we care. Be confident the time you spend building Assets will make a positive difference in all aspects of young people’s lives.

We know there are lots of Asset building things you already do for your own children and children in the community — even if you don’t call them by that name. Please see sidebar for some ideas on how to be intentional about Asset building.

Tips: Ways to effectively connect with teens

So…how can you let them know how you feel without them shutting you out?

Developing open, trusting communication between you and your teens is essential to healthy development and helping them avoid alcohol or substance use. If your teens feel comfortable talking openly with you, you’ll have a greater chance of guiding them toward healthy decision making.

• Build youth Assets! Promote healthy activities (sports, clubs, a part-time job). Spend time together, support them, notice them.

• Listen, connect and communicate! Be available! Teens do listen! And they care about what you think—AND listen to what they have to say.

• Observe. Pay attention to what is in your home, connect with their friends, keep track of their activities.

• Be a good role model. Set a positive example, they are observing you, too.

• Encourage. A sense of purpose and responsibility in your teen. RESPECT their views and input.

• Be firm and consistent. Establish clear family rules about drugs and alcohol. Enforce the rules you set — your clear rules can allow your child to be the “reason” for not engaging in risky behavior.

• Encourage conversation. Encourage your kids to talk about whatever interests them. Listen without interruption and give them a chance to teach you something new.

• Give them a smile, kind word, and letting them know we care. Be confident the time you spend building Assets will make a positive difference in all aspects of young people’s lives.

• Make every conversation a “win-win”

Caring Adults = Protective Factors

Developmental relationships are a protective factor for youth! When youth are engaged in developmental relationships with caring adults in their families, neighborhoods, schools and communities they are more likely to grow into healthy, caring, responsible adults. How do you show the young people in your life you care?

Developmental Relationships: Making A Difference in the Lives of Youth

Supportive relationships with parents, teachers, coaches, and others are critical for healthy development.

Young people are more likely to grow up successfully when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, build Assets, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to their communities. Relationships that encompass these 5 elements make a powerful difference in the lives of young people.

• Express care — Show me I matter to you.

• Challenge growth — Push me to keep on getting better.

• Provide support — Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.

• Share power — Treat me with respect and give me a say.

• Expand possibilities — Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.

www.search-institute.org

FACT: The most common reason young people give for not using alcohol and drugs is not wanting to harm their relationship with adults in their lives.

For more information on Developmental Assets and Relationships framework visit tritowncouncil.org/developmental-frameworks

MORE of us do it!
If we change our perceptions, we change our reality.

How Science of the Positive and Positive Community Norms Can Impact Our Communities

The big question: How to stay positive? Given the 24-hour news cycle, the relentless nature of our social media feeds, and access to information whenever, wherever, and however we want it, it can often feel like we live in a frightening world, where dangers and problems seem pervasive and overwhelming. This comes into particularly sharp focus when we consider the issues and risks that our youth are faced with on a daily basis.

Enter the Science of the Positive. That sounds good, but what does that actually mean? It means that you can change the lens through which you view the world, and, while acknowledging and addressing the concerns, grow the positive, by first recognizing where it exists and then, with intention, growing it. How? By shining a light on all the good, positive behaviors that exist in any community. This then allows us to strengthen “protective factors” for our youth by growing the positive that already exists.

Sounds like social-work jargon - How does it relate to keeping kids safe? As parents, caring adults and communities that care deeply about the health and well-being of youth, we absolutely are concerned about youth vaping. Is everyone doing it? NO! Do we need to promote the healthy norm that most kids do not vape among ourselves, our kids and our community? Absolutely.

Positive Community Norms: Empowering our youth to be part of the majority. So, what difference does educating kids about the norm make? By highlighting the positive norm, we are encouraging, and in turn, promoting, the healthy behavior. It may sound simplistic, a sort of childish “turn that frown upside down” mindset, but research unequivocally shows that highlighting the positive works! Why?

Positive Community Norms is all about balancing concern (the very real dangers and harm that our communities face) with hope (the equally real sources of strength and positive change that exist in our communities, too).”

— JEFF LINKENBACH, FOUNDER, THE MONTANA INSTITUTE

What’s in a Norm?

Dr. Jeff Linkenbach defines SOCIAL NORMS:

- Behaviors or attitudes held by the majority of people in a community or group.

For example, if most people in a community do not smoke cigarettes, then NOT smoking is the norm. If most people do not approve of others smoking, this, too, is a norm. Not smoking is normal and perhaps even expected in this population, and thus would be considered a social norm in that community.

Not surprisingly, youth tend to conform to the perceived norms of their peers, or feel social pressure to do so—which can be a problem when they are considering risky behavior. Here’s why: if youth misperceive that more of their peers are drinking, smoking and engaging in risk behaviors than actually are, they are more likely to do the same. These misperceptions reinforce the belief that “everyone else is doing it” which can be a powerful influencer. Studies show that when communities are repeatedly exposed to consistent, positive, data-based messages promoting the actual, prevalent, and positive behaviors of youth (i.e. norms), perceptions begin to shift from “everyone is doing it” to the more accurate perception that “NOT everyone does it.” If we change perceptions, we change behavior. Healthy kids equal a healthy community. Simple. Profound. Positive.

Did you know?

Tri-Town Council has a youth substance use prevention coalition—a community wide partnership whose focus is to prevent/reduce youth substance use and PROMOTE and GROW healthy youth norms?

Learn more at tritowncouncil.org/coalition.

People tend to behave in ways they think is most typical of and accepted by their peers.

Healthy Youth = Healthy Community!

Supporting Tri-Town Council will help fulfill our vision of a community where all youth have the relationships, supports and skills necessary to grow and develop into resilient, healthy, thriving adults. Please consider your gift to Tri-Town Council an investment in our youth, our communities and our future.

Please make your secure donation online at tritowncouncil.org today!

Thank you for your support!

Want to learn more about Tri-Town youth perceptions and health/safety behaviors?

Take a look at the YRBS & APS data at tritowncouncil.org/coalition.

Above are samples from a Tri-Town Council Positive Community Norms campaign promoting the healthy norms of Masco High School youth.
The mental health needs of our youth are rising. One in five youth between 13 and 18 is experiencing a mental health disorder (National Alliance on Mental Illness) And, suicide is now the second leading cause of death for individuals between 15 and 24. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) The stress of life in the world of social media, meeting high academic achievement goals, a world that anticipates catastrophe and the high levels of anxiety is taking a toll on our teenagers. 

But, we can help!

As adults, the more information we have enables us to help reduce stigma surrounding mental health as well as be more effective in supporting our teenagers to build resilience as they navigate the complicated world of adolescence. The Youth Mental Health First Aid training is one way to learn how to do that. Developed by the National Council on Behavioral Health, the training is a comprehensive 8 hour curriculum that helps participants learn about the challenges of adolescent development, common mental health challenges experienced in adolescence, and the signs and symptoms of someone who may be experiencing a mental health/substance abuse challenge or crisis.

The training provides a 5-step action plan that helps define and highlight those skills and tools that are important when working with teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. This includes resources and types of support services that are available in our community, as well as discussing suicide and other crisis situations. While the subject matter is critically important and serious, the training is interactive, informative and fun. Anyone can attend – especially those who regularly interact with youth. The more adults in our communities who have this knowledge and information, the better we can help youth, whether it is where we live or where we work. This training provides tools that allow us to support youth in any role; on the job, at home, with family members, the next door neighbors’ children or the kids on the team.

Sometimes first aid isn’t a bandage, CPR or calling 911. Sometimes it’s YOU.

**Youth Mental Health First Aid**

**Tips and Advice**

1. Regularly check in with each other by asking simple questions (e.g. how are you feeling today?)
2. Don’t be afraid to talk openly about your mental health
3. Support and listen genuinely to each other. Care for each other’s feelings and emotions
4. Be a positive role model. Practice self care among your family members.
5. Schedule in some family time to relax and take care of your mental health
6. Stay in touch with each other. A text or email can go a long way
7. Show your family member that you are there for them
8. Take time to understand what is it your family member is going through
9. Be patient. Don’t criticize and be aware of how you talk to your family member. Encourage and support
10. Tell them that you are proud of them for talking about their mental health

**Youth Mental Health First Aid Training is Generously Funded by the Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation**

**PROJECT Safety Net**

When times are tough 978.771.4619 it’s anonymous

**Who should participate?**

- Anyone who regularly interacts with young people ages 12 - 18 like:
  - Teachers, school staff and coaches
  - Parents
  - Youth workers, faith leaders and caring citizens

**What is the course about?**

Over two sessions participants will learn:

- Risk factors/warning signs of common adolescent mental health challenges
- Importance of early intervention
- How to support youth developing signs/symptoms of mental health illness or emotional crisis by applying a 5 step core action plan:
  - Assess for suicide or harm
  - Listen non-judgmentally
  - Give reassurance and information
  - Encourage appropriate professional help
  - Encourage self help and other support strategies

**Who should participate?**

- Anyone who regularly interacts with young people ages 12 - 18 like:
  - Teachers, school staff and coaches
  - Parents
  - Youth workers, faith leaders and caring citizens

**Youth Mental Health First Aid Course**

**Take a course. Save a life. Strengthen your community. Get certified.**

**The 5 A’s of promoting body confidence in your child**

**Assertiveness**

- Reflect on your own beliefs regarding what it means to be a male and female.
- Challenge gender stereotypes, such as purchasing toys for boys and dolls for girls.
- Or, blue items for boys and pink items for girls.
- Buy toys and books based on what your child likes instead of what society promotes.
- Encourage and support activities that teach assertiveness so that your child feels that they have a voice and will be heard.

**Awareness**

- Help them build awareness by teaching them about the effect that the media and advertising have on their body confidence.
- Teach your child to look critically at advertisements, media images and messages.
- Let your child know that they have the power to choose what media they look at and what products they buy. Remind them to take a break if Instagram or Snapchat causes them to feel bad about themselves.

**Acceptance**

- Promote size diversity in your family.
- Everyone grows at a different rate! The more accepting you are of your own body, the more accepting your child will be of theirs.
- Set strict rules about body bashing. It’s never ok to joke around concerning someone else’s appearance. Fat/ skinny/ short jokes are not funny and can be damaging to a growing child’s sense of self.

**Action**

- Encourage your child to take action by becoming more connected with others.
- Healthy connections are not based on appearance.
- Encourage your child to identify and appropriately express their emotions.
- Model this strategy with your own emotions.
- Develop a list of skills that you and your child can use when emotions get strong, such as a deep breathing exercises, yoga poses, squeezing a squishy ball, taking a walk, listening to music, or snuggling with a pet.

**Activity**

- Create many opportunities where your child can move their body. Emphasize the importance of activity, moving for pleasure, and how moving helps our bodies feel better.
- Do not equate exercise with weight loss.
- Teach your child about the mind body connection. Practice mindful eating at mealtimes. Make time for family meals.

See the Youth Mental Health First Aid Course for adults assisting young people at northshorecounseling.org.

Learn more at youthmentalhealthfirstaidusa.org.
E-cigarettes contain nicotine. Nicotine is a highly addictive substance.

According to the Surgeon General, because the brain isn’t fully developed until the mid 20s, youth and young adults are uniquely at risk for long term, long lasting effects of exposing their developing brains to nicotine. These risks include nicotine addiction, mood disorders, and permanent lowering of impulse control. Nicotine also changes the way synapses are formed, which can harm the parts of the brain that control attention and learning.

### Frequently Asked Questions About Vaping

What is vaping? **Vaping** is the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol (often called vapor) produced by an e-cigarette or similar battery-powered device.

What is an e-cigarette? E-cigarettes are battery-powered vaporizers that simulate the action and sensation of smoking.

What are other names for e-cigarettes? They are also known as e-cigs, vape pens, e-hookahs, e-pipes, tanks, mods, vapes, electronic cigarette delivery systems, or ENDS, and more. Some people refer to vaping devices by their brand name such as JUUL, BO, Blu, and others.

What kinds/types of e-cigarettes are there? E-cigarettes come in many different sizes, types, and colors. Some e-cigarettes are made to look like regular cigarettes, cigars, or pipes. Some resemble pens, small electronic devices such as USB sticks, and other everyday items. The products that are designed to resemble small electronic devices are often compact and allow for discreet carrying and use—at home, in school hallways and bathrooms, and even in classrooms.

What is in e-cigarettes? My child says it’s simply flavored water, what’s so bad about it? E-cigarettes contain pre-filled pods or e-liquid that the user adds to the device. E-liquids generally consist of propylene glycol, glycerin, water, nicotine, and flavors. Many of these e-cigarettes and other substances are harmful to the body. 

E-cigarettes produce an aerosol, commonly called vapor, which users inhale from the device and exhale. The aerosol can contain harmful and potentially harmful substances, including:

- **Nicotine**
- Ultrapure particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs
- Flavoring such as diacetyl, a chemical linked to a serious lung disease
- Volatile organic compounds such as benzene, which is found in car exhaust, and heavy metals, such as nickel, tin, and lead.

### Tips for Talking with Your Kids About Vaping

Know the facts. Learn about e-cigarettes and young people before you start the conversation with your child.

- E-cigarettes are known by many different names. They are sometimes called e-cigs, vape pens, e-hookahs, e-pipes, tanks, mods, vapes, electronic cigarette delivery systems, or ENDS, and more. Some people refer to vaping devices by their brand name such as JUUL, BO, Blu, and others.
- E-cigarettes contain nicotine. It can have harmful and potentially harmful effects on the body. It can cause lung disease and lead to addiction.

Be truthful about what you know about the dangers of vaping, and what you know about what they are doing. Nicotine can harm a teenager’s developing brain and lead to addiction.

Be patient and ready to listen. Your goal is to have a conversation, not to deliver a lecture. 

Avoid criticism and encourage an open dialogue.

Asking questions can make children think more about their behavior. 

There is no “perfect time” to talk. Driving in the car together or waiting at an appointment is often the best time. You can start by mentioning a news story, a TV show, or something that he or she heard about vaping. 

Ask what your child thinks. Ask him/her what they think about a situation you witness together such as seeing someone use an e-cigarette, passing a vape shop when you are out, or seeing an e-cigarette advertisement.

There is no “perfect talk.” Consider your talks with your child about vaping as a learning opportunity for both of you, and perhaps just the beginning of an ongoing dialogue. You may have some facts about vaping at hand, but concede that you don’t know all the answers. It will go a long way to keep your kids from going on the defensive.

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Alcohol myths vs. facts

MYTH: “If we change the minimum drinking age back to 18 instead of 21, it would reduce problems with underage drinking.”

FACT: Researchers consider the change to 21 to be one of the most successful public safety and public health policies in history. Since it was changed to 21 in 1984, deaths from drinking and driving accidents have decreased by thousands, saving more than 500,000 lives.

MYTH: “In Europe, youth drink more responsibly than in the U.S.”

FACT: According to data collected from 15-16-year-olds in 35 European countries, European teens actually drink more often, more heavily, and get drunk more often than American teens.

MYTH: “Alcohol is safer than other drugs.”

FACT: The teen brain is especially vulnerable to addiction due to the rapid growth and development that takes place during adolescence. 40% of teens who begin drinking at age 15 go on to become alcoholics. Other illegal drugs combined.

MYTH: “Kids are going to drink anyway; it’s a right of passage.”

FACT: Contrary to popular belief, most kids don’t drink. The Tri-Town YRBS surveys consistently show that MOST Tri-Town teens don’t drink. Misperceptions of “everybody is doing it” actually make young people more likely to drink alcohol. But when these misperceptions are corrected, and youth realize that “NOT everybody is doing it,” they are less likely to drink alcohol.

MYTH: “It’s better for kids to start drinking young so they can learn how to handle it.”

FACT: Alcohol impacts a teen differently than an adult because the adolescent brain is still developing—especially the part of the brain that deals with decision-making. Drinking before the age of 21 places kids at higher risk for academic failure, depression, suicide, and sexual assault. It also increases their risk for alcohol dependence.

The facts about Rx drug abuse

What are the risks?

Some Rx drugs such as opioids/opiates, depressants and stimulants may lead to adverse health effects including addiction. These drugs, when prescribed and monitored by a medical professional and used responsibly, are relatively safe and effective. But risk of dependence and addiction exists; the US is in the midst of a prescription opioid overdose epidemic. The risks increase significantly if medications are abused—meaning they are taken for reasons and in doses not approved by a doctor, or taken by persons other than the prescribed Rx drug abuse can lead to other illicit drug use.

Who is at risk?

- Young adults (age 18-25): Have highest rates of Rx drug use
- Older adults (age 50+): Because more than 80% of older adults use at least one Rx medication daily, with more than 50% taking more than 5 medication/supplements daily. This can potentially lead to accidental or intentional misuse.

What can we do to prevent Rx drug abuse?

- There are specific strategies to decrease the likelihood of Rx drug abuse: Talk, Talk, Talk! Children and teens whose parents/caregivers talk with them early and often about the dangers of drugs and alcohol use are less likely to use them—by as much as 50%.

Rx drugs can lead to other illicit drug use. 4 out of 5 heroin users started out by abusing opioids.

Drug Definitions and Common Brand Names

OPIATES and OPIOIDS

Opioids and opiates are often used interchangeably.

Definitions:

Opiates: Drugs derived from opium poppy plants
Opioids: Synthetic drugs created to simulate effects of opium but chemically different

Purpose: To relieve pain

Common Opioids/Opiates: Vicodin, Percocet, Fentanyl, Oxycotin, Morphine, Demerol, Codeine

DEPRESSANTS

Definition: Drugs that slow down activity in the brain and spinal cord

Purpose: To relieve stress, anxiety and treat sleep disorders

Common Depressants: Valium, Xanax, Nembutal, Ambien, Klopnopin

STIMULANTS (AMPHETAMINES)

Definition: Drugs that increase activity in the brain/body boosting energy, alertness and attention, raise heart and breathing rate and blood pressure

Purpose: To deal with ADHD, narcolepsy, and some forms of depression

Common Stimulants: Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta

Rx drugs can lead to other illicit drug use. 4 out of 5 heroin users started out by abusing opioids.

Learn more, find support. Contact TTC at 978-877-4521 or tritowncouncil.org.

MYTH: “Every teen uses marijuana”

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FACT: According to data collected from 15-16-year-olds in 35 European countries, European teens actually drink more often, more heavily, and get drunk more often than American teens.

MYTH: “Alcohol is safer than other drugs.”

FACT: The teen brain is especially vulnerable to addiction due to the rapid growth and development that takes place during adolescence. 40% of teens who begin drinking at age 15 go on to become alcoholics. Other illegal drugs combined.

MYTH: “Kids are going to drink anyway; it’s a right of passage.”

FACT: Contrary to popular belief, most kids don’t drink. The Tri-Town YRBS surveys consistently show that MOST Tri-Town teens don’t drink. Misperceptions of “everybody is doing it” actually make young people more likely to drink alcohol. But when these misperceptions are corrected, and youth realize that “NOT everybody is doing it,” they are less likely to drink alcohol.

MYTH: “It’s better for kids to start drinking young so they can learn how to handle it.”

FACT: Alcohol impacts a teen differently than an adult because the adolescent brain is still developing—especially the part of the brain that deals with decision-making. Drinking before the age of 21 places kids at higher risk for academic failure, depression, suicide, and sexual assault. It also increases their risk for alcohol dependence.

Alcohol myths vs. facts

MYTH: “If we change the minimum drinking age back to 18 instead of 21, it would reduce problems with underage drinking.”

FACT: Researchers consider the change to 21 to be one of the most successful public safety and public health policies in history. Since it was changed to 21 in 1984, deaths from drinking and driving accidents have decreased by thousands, saving more than 500,000 lives.

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By Chaske Roth Nelson – Tusfield resident, writer, social media influencer, activist, school committee chair and parent volunteer.

Pop Quiz: What is Facebook? If you’re scratching your head, it’s time to read up on the trendy new social media apps kids are using. Find your child on Facebook is now just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to online safety. Read on to see some of the sites and apps tweens and teens are flocking to, and get useful tips for protecting your child from cyberbullying and other online safety hazards.

TikTok
Purpose: For creating and sharing short videos. Users can create short music videos of 3 to 15 seconds and short looping videos of 3 to 60 seconds. It encourages users to express themselves creatively through video. Special effects can be added to the videos.

Why Parents Should Worry: Thirteen is the minimum age, but there isn’t a real way to validate age so anyone can download the app. Also, parents express concern that there is a lot of inappropriate language in the videos so it’s not appropriate for young children. Lastly, by default, all accounts are set to public so strangers can contact your children.

Snapchat
Purpose: Allows users to send photos and videos that disappear after they’re received. It’s rated ages 12+. The filters and special effects allow users to alter pictures.
Why Parents Should Worry: Some kids are using the app to send racy pics because they believe the images can’t be saved and circulated. But it turns out that Snapchat photos don’t completely disappear from a device, and users can take a screenshot before an image vanishes in the app. And while recent studies revealed that “ Sexting” (sending sexual messages and images, usually via text message) is not as popular as parents had feared, “disappearing photo” apps like Snapchat might enable kids to send more explicit photos and texts than they would have before through traditional testing.

VSCO
Purpose: A photo creation app that gives users the tools to shoot, edit and post images in a profile, kind of like Instagram.
Why Parents Should Worry: You should know that you have to manually turn on privacy settings and limit location sharing. There are also in-app purchases for more serious photo editing tools that could cost you some serious money if your kid decides to download them.

Kik Messenger
Purpose: A mobile app people can use to text with friends at high speed and with a high character limit. The app is easy to use and doesn’t require internet access to exchange messages.
Why Parents Should Worry: It’s rated T for teen and there is no age verification so anyone can download it. Like some other instant messaging apps, Kik allows your teen to connect with others using a username (rather than texting from a phone number). But it begs the question. Should teens be texting with people beyond their phone contacts?
Reviews on an App Store and Google Play store reveal that many people use Kik to meet strangers for sexting. The app has been connected with cyberbullying. It’s no surprise Kik has landed on some parents “wants apps” lists. Check out bewaresmart.com’s advice on Kik.

Per the CDC, sexual activity among high school youth has decreased in the past decade but digital sexual activity is becoming more common.

Next Steps for Parents
Sit down with your child and find out which apps she’s using, how they work, and whether she has experienced any issues on them, such as cyberbullying or contact from strangers. Look into apps that help you monitor your child online. And keep these tips in mind:
• Set up age limits on your child’s device.
• Rather than hovering or completely barring your child from downloading every social media app, sit down and go over some general rules, such as: “If you wouldn’t share it with your family, don’t share it online.”
• Tell your child to let you know if someone is hurting her or making her feel uncomfortable online, even if the person is acting anonymously.
• When your child wants to join a new social media platform, go through the security settings together to choose the ones you’re most comfortable with. Advise your child not to share passwords with anyone, including best friends, boyfriends, or girlfriends.

Tech companies have the right to “censor” hate speech. The First Amendment applies to government, not to private companies. Social media and other privately owned sites and apps have the right to determine the type of speech they allow on their platform. Just as nudity is legal, it’s generally not allowed on many mainstream platforms. Companies have the right to enforce terms of service or community guidelines that dictate what may or may not be posted on their platforms.

A few things parents and educators can do to combat hate speech.
• Parents and educators can start by taking preventative action, by dealing with situations before they reach the hate speech level.

Combating Hate Speech
What is hate speech? Hate speech is more than just harsh words. It can be any form of expression intended to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred against a group or class of people. It can occur offline or online. It can be communicating using words, symbols, images, or other means. In general, online hate speech targets a person or group because of characteristics tied closely to their identity, like race, color, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, or sexual identity.

What is the difference between hate speech and critical speech?
Not all negative speech is hate speech. You could, for example, disagree with a religious doctrine or policy without being hateful. You could be opposed to a government whose citizens widely practice a particular religion or are from a dominant ethnic group without being hateful to that group. You could criticize customs practiced by different groups without necessarily demeaning individuals in those groups or threatening their well-being. You could voluntarily disagree or criticize a public official or any other person without it being hate speech. But it can become hate speech if those criticisms are framed in a way designed to imply that the criticism is based, at least in part, on their identity rather than what they say or how they act.

Is hate speech a form of bullying?
Hate speech and bullying often overlap. Bullying, whether in-person or online, is defined as repeated, unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying can morph into hate speech when hate speech is directed at a group or person based on characteristics such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or body image.

Usages of hate speech
Individuals, organizations, and communities use hate speech to label people who are targeted by hate speech and bullies and to prevent the spread of false information and hate speech.

Guidelines for parents
As a parent, you can be proactive by setting up boundaries and examining your child’s online activity. Here’s some advice:
• Teach your child never to forward a sext and to let an adult know right away if one is received.
• Did you know... Snapchat photos do not disappear as claimed – the app allows the photo to be shared on the phone and they can be extracted.

Teach your child about the concept of digital citizenship and the impact it has on personal identity and relationships. This includes understanding that what is said online can affect others. Discuss with your child the importance of being kind and respectful online.

• When your child wants to join a new social media platform, go through the security settings together to choose the ones you’re most comfortable with. Advise your child not to share passwords with anyone, including best friends, boyfriends, or girlfriends.

• Be sure your child is aware of the differences between hate speech and critical speech. This can help them understand when it’s appropriate to express their opinions and when it’s not. For example, criticizing a public official is different from65

Encourage empathy in children and remind them that, when engaging with others online, there is another person on the other side of the screen. Encourage children to have an open attitude and honest curiosity about other people because some instances of hate speech are based on ignorance or false information or designed to recruit young people to a hate group or radical ideology.

• Look for terms that might creep into a child’s vocabulary. Sometimes kids (and adults) use derogatory terms without realizing their impact. They may not mean to be hateful but the words they use can still be hurtful and they may be getting into bad habits. Don’t overreact to these situations. Lots of kids use derogatory terms without realizing it. They’re not being hateful but they might need to be reminded that their words impact others.

Schools can foster a climate of tolerance and inclusion to both prevent and eradicate hate speech and create a social norm around acceptance of all students, regardless of who they are.
• Teachers can help students by posing realistic scenarios that they are likely to experience online and encouraging them to work together to come up with the words and actions they can use to stand up for people who are targeted by hate speech and bullies and to prevent the spread of false information and hate speech.

• Educators and parents can teach by example, being sure their own words don’t contribute to the problem.

• School can be able to take action if online hate speech impacts the school or any students or staff even if the hate speech did not take place on campus or during school hours.
Healthy Life Habits: Tips for Teens

Biological sleep patterns shift for both sleeping and waking during adolescence. It’s natural for teens to try to stay awake before 11pm. There are things that teens can do to help fall asleep earlier but they require effort and consistency.

• Make sleep a priority. What do you need to change to get to bed at a reasonable hour—sleep that is more restful and leaves you feeling fresher in the morning?

• Make your room a sleep haven. Keep it cool, quiet and dark. How about blacking out your smartphone and any other devices that you use that might keep you awake!

• Avoid caffeine after 12:00pm. The half life of caffeine in your body is 6-9 hours. That means the energy drink you had at 3pm with 80mg of caffeine in it. There’s still 40mg of caffeine in your body by 9pm. That will keep you awake!

• Stick to a bed and wake-time. A consistent routine will help you feel less tired, it allows your body to get in sync with its natural patterns. You’ll find it’s easier to fall asleep at bedtime with this type of routine.

• Don’t eat, drink, or exercise within a few hours of bedtime. Snack, chat with friends, activities, and will help you fall asleep much more easily!

• Do your homework for the last minute. Try to get it done at least an hour before bedtime, so your mind can calm down.

• Avoid all screens in the hour before bed. The screen’s blue light keeps us awake—it’s the same light that our bodies see at high noon, and makes us feel more awake.

• Leave devices outside your bedroom. It’s too tempting to check your phone when you’re in your room. If you must have your phone in your bedroom, set a timer to let yourself use your phone for example, 30 minutes before going to sleep, you’ll be less likely to stay awake worrying or stressing.

Set them up for success!

Help Your Child Tackle Long-Term School Projects

Avoid Over-Involvement. Build the Capacity of Youth to Engage Executive Function

by Stephanie Mengen, Founder, Impact on Youth Educational Services and Tri-Town resident

Goals
Multi-faceted school projects can be stressful for families, particularly when you find it difficult to plan and organize work tasks and manage time and resources independently. Some may avoid getting started, and find it hard to sustain focus and complete work articles. At deadlines looming and tasks are unfinished, young people can feel overwhelmed.

It’s tempting to jump in and help complete the project, but that doesn’t address the underlying issues. For many, the core reason for project-related struggles is the uneven development of youth’s Executive Function.

Fortunately Executive Function skills can improve. Executive coaching is provided by teachers, parents or tutors. Here are some strategic coaching tips to strengthen your child’s project-related Executive Function skills.

• Map out the project. What needs to be done? What would be the logical steps to take?

• Break the project into manageable parts. What can be completed in one sitting? What must be completed before you can move on to the next part?

• Manage daily routines. Control emotions. Achieve goals.

• Consider which skill areas need strengthening. Look them GLSDG (plan org) or a rubric or survey that describes expectation for group members. When the project is done, these tools also enable youth to document individual contributions and collaborative efforts.

• Provide the right capacity-building support at the right time. Ask teachers for suggestions to help your child tackle a particular Executive Function skill that are particularly challenging for him/her. Additionally, some youth may benefit from tutoring or coaching in Executive Function skills application as they work through a project.

What is Executive Function? A set of complex brain activities that work together to help you complete tasks and overcome obstacles. As deadlines loom and tasks are unfinished, you may feel overwhelmed.

What do you need to

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Steps to Goal Achievement

1. I know what to do

2. I know how to do it

3. I begin

4. I work through each step

5. I reflect on what is and isn’t working—adapt and change as needed

6. I stick with and complete the tasks

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