

Kentucky's Youth SPEAK OUT Against Substance Use

Bloom Kentucky, with the support of the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, recently conducted research to hear directly from Kentucky's youth on the impact of substance use and how we can prioritize substance use prevention. We heard from 52 high school students from across the state who provided input via focus groups and survey responses based on their experience and the experiences of their peers.

SETTING THE SCENE



- **73%** of student survey respondents shared that they feel either concerned or very concerned about the level of substance use in their school.
- Among student participants, **vapes and e-cigarette usage** was the most commonly discussed issue regarding substance use among their peers.

Students reported that while they know of some instances where the use of opiates is taking place among peers, they most commonly reported the opioid epidemic impacting the adults in their peers' lives.

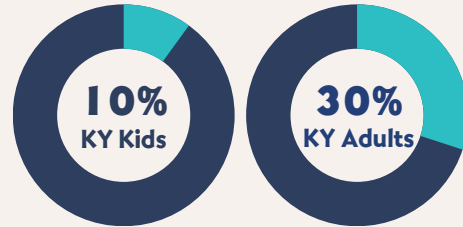
**HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
TAYLOR COUNTY**

"[We need] support for students whose parents use. Target both youth and parents because they are influencing use in their children or other students"

**HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
OLDHAM COUNTY**

"Vapes is the big thing—everyone knows someone that has been around a vape, or does it themselves."

ACEs in KY



Has lived with someone who had a problem with alcohol or drugs*

* Data on adults who experienced ACEs is from the Kentucky Department for Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Kentucky Behavioral Risk Factor Survey Data - Adverse Childhood Experiences, 2020. Data on the percent of children who experienced ACEs is from the 2019-20 National Survey of Children's Health.

REASONS YOUTH HAVE TURNED TO SUBSTANCES:

Peer Pressure

School

Depression

Stress

Anxiety

Social Media

Trauma

Isolation

Interpersonal relationship struggles

**HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
GRAVES COUNTY**

"With trauma, they have two options: they either go seek help or they turn to substances to numb themselves out."

According to student survey responses, stress, anxiety, peer pressure, and depression ranked among the top four risk factors impacting youth substance use.

Kentucky's Youth

SPEAK OUT

Against Substance Use

Students shared their thoughts on solutions to help mitigate and prevent substance use among peers. The following student-suggested solutions have both policy and programmatic implications that can help address youth substance use prevention at the state and local levels.



SOLUTIONS

INVESTING IN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Students shared the need for fun and safe activities for youth within their communities. By providing safe, substance-free environments, young people can focus on building positive and healthy relationships with their peers and community members.



Substance Use Prevention Spotlight:
Just Say Yes - Franklin County, Kentucky

- Partnering with families, schools, businesses, faith groups, local government, and community organizations to promote healthy environments for youth in Franklin County.
- Yes Card
 - Pilot program that provides funding directly to families to pay for after-school and other out-of-school time activities.
 - Helps students access healthy, supervised activities during the hours outside of school time when risk for substance use and other harmful behaviors is highest.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
HANCOCK COUNTY

"We need more safe activities to do on the weekends and during the summer."

INVESTING IN COMPREHENSIVE SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

More comprehensive education on substance use and the harmful health impacts of substances was brought up as a need among students. Students shared that substance use prevention programming should be offered Kindergarten through 12th grade to ensure prevention education is shared early and often during students' academic careers.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
TAYLOR COUNTY

"Messages need to be tailored for elementary age and advance as youth get older. [Kids] need these messages at both ages."

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
OLDHAM COUNTY

"Kids aren't going to open up unless they know the person and trust them. Mental health counselors don't know us on a personal level because they have so many students. It's a great idea but you have to have the resources and amount of people for that to be able to get to know kids well enough and to open up."

SUPPORTING YOUTH THROUGH POSITIVE ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

Whether a student is at risk of initiating substance use due to mental health concerns or is currently using and needs support to quit, creating supportive environments for students to learn is a critical piece of prevention. Providing safe spaces to connect with caring adults is a key factor for all students, as well as ensuring meaningful access to mental health providers is available for those who need it.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
OLDHAM COUNTY

"Fear mongering is not an effective tactic."

MODIFYING PROGRAM MESSAGING AND DELIVERY

Students shared that substance use prevention messaging and delivery should be modified to better meet the needs of today's students. Positive, strengths-based framing, as well as engaging program activities, were among students' suggested solutions for effective communication tactics for youth.

