

SEPTEMBER 2025

THE CHARLES TOWN INITIATIVE

Monthly Newsletter



DEAR CHARLES TOWN,

Welcome to the first issue of our community newsletter! We're excited to share updates, stories, and resources that support the wellbeing of youth, families, and communities. Each issue will highlight local programs, share tips for building resilience, and showcase the inspiring work happening across our network. Whether you're a parent, educator, community leader, or youth advocate, this newsletter is for you. Together, we can create safer, healthier environments where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Thank you for being part of this important work!



Charles Town Initiative

IN THIS ISSUE

INTRODUCING: THE
CHARLES TOWN
INITIATIVE LOGO

MEET OUR TEAM:
MISTY, BRIAN, AND
DANIELLE

CANNABIS POISONINGS
ARE RISING – WHAT
PARENTS AND
CAREGIVERS NEED TO
KNOW

Success by Numbers

August 2025

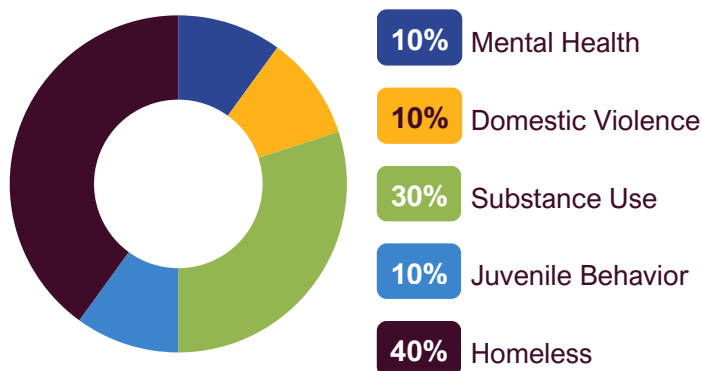
Number of Mental Health Screenings

1

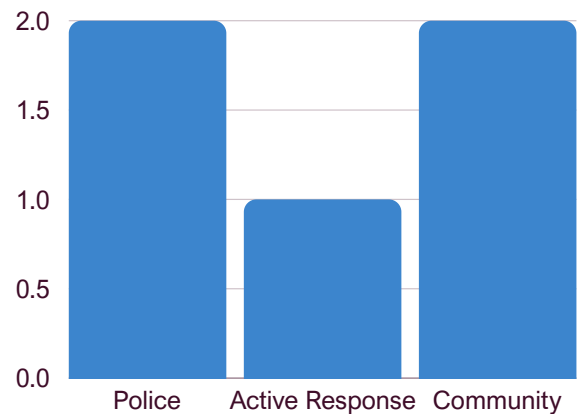
Number of Social Determinants of Health Screenings

4

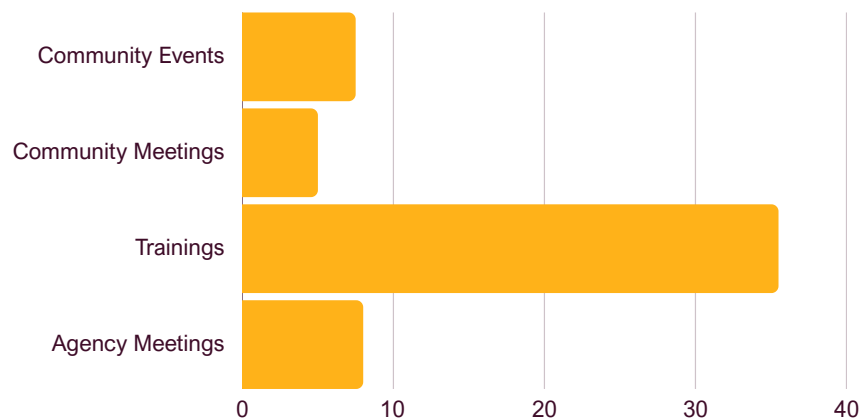
Reasons for New Referrals



Source of Referrals



Hours Spent at Community Events, Meetings, and Trainings



Crisis Interventions Provided

1



Charles Town Initiative

INTRODUCING: THE CHARLES TOWN INITIATIVE LOGO

We are excited to share the new logo for the Charles Town Initiative, a fresh symbol of our commitment to building a stronger, safer, and more connected community.

The design reflects the values at the heart of our work — protection, unity, and growth. Its vibrant colors convey trust, compassion, and hope, while the overall flow captures the movement of a community working together toward progress. Just as our mission brings together residents, social workers, law enforcement, and healthcare providers, the logo represents the spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility that guides everything we do.



Charles Town Initiative

More than just an image, this logo embodies a promise: to care for one another, to build resilience, and to create a future where all members of Charles Town feel supported and empowered. It is a reminder that lasting change happens when we come together as one community.

MEET OUR TEAM

Misty Waits: New Police Social Worker in Charles Town

We're thrilled to welcome Misty Waits to The Charles Town Initiative team as the new Police Social Worker based at the Charles Town Police Department!

Before joining us, Misty spent three years as a crisis worker with WVU Medicine at Berkeley Medical Center and Jefferson Medical Center. There, she worked closely with patients experiencing mental health and substance use challenges. Although she found the work deeply rewarding, she often felt limited in her ability to fully support people through their recovery.

"I ALWAYS FELT LIKE I COULD DO MORE OR BE THERE TO ADVOCATE FOR THEM MORE," MISTY SHARED.

When a friend encouraged her to apply for the Police Social Worker position, Misty saw the opportunity to create deeper connections and have a broader impact—directly in the community.

In her new role, Misty partners with peers, task forces, and local organizations to support prevention and harm reduction efforts. She's focused on building trust with individuals who may be facing difficult circumstances, including those returning home from treatment or experiencing homelessness.

"I WANT TO BE SOMEONE THAT ANYONE CAN COME TO—REGARDLESS OF AGE—TO TALK ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE OR MENTAL HEALTH."



Misty is especially proud of earning her master's degree and making her long-held dream of helping others a reality. "For a long time, I never knew how to get there," she reflects. Now she's fully immersed in work that aligns with her passion and purpose.

And when she's not out in the community, Misty recharges in quieter ways. "As much as I love to be out and work in the community, on my days off I enjoy just staying at home, reading a book in a quiet room."

Please join us in giving Misty a warm welcome as she steps into this vital role!

MEET OUR TEAM

Brian Hairston: Lead Mentor

When Brian Hairston first began mentoring in January 2020, his role was loosely defined, focused mostly on mentoring through informal relationships. “My worldview was different back then,” he reflects. “Before COVID, I thought this was just a job. But the pandemic gave me a big leap in maturity and understanding. I realized—this isn’t about me. It’s more than a career. It’s a calling.”

Brian began his work in Berkeley County, where he spent years mentoring students, building relationships, and becoming a trusted presence in schools and community spaces. Now, he’s excited to expand his work into Jefferson County.

In his current role, Brian supports programs like Too Good for Drugs, attends community events, and continues to grow The Charles Town Initiative’s presence across the county. Whether he’s handing out brochures, chatting with youth, or quietly offering encouragement over a game of chess, Brian brings patience, empathy, and deep purpose to every interaction.

But mentoring, for Brian, is not confined to school hours or scheduled activities.

“I don’t stop interacting with these kids when they’re out of school. I believe in life-long relationships.”

Many of the youth he first met during his early work at the Boys and Girls Club still keep in touch— and help out when needed, like a former mentee who recently stepped in to deliver supplies to the Ramer Center.



Brian’s style of mentorship is built on presence, consistency, and patience.

“A LOT OF MY DAY IS SPENT DOING RECREATIONAL THINGS—BASKETBALL, FOOTBALL—SO THE KIDS SEE ME NOT AS SOMEONE TRYING TO MAKE THEM DO THEIR WORK, BUT AS A CONSISTENT, POSITIVE PRESENCE.”

One of Brian’s proudest moments came recently when a student he began mentoring in third grade—now a seventh grader—asked him to attend a Youth Recognition event at the police station. “That meant the world to me,” he says. “I don’t always see the impact right away, but over time, you start to witness growth.”

Rooted to Grow: Mentoring & Gardening

Outside of mentoring, Brian has also worked as a garden manager. What began as a temporary position quickly evolved into a source of spiritual and personal inspiration. Shortly after, he enrolled in and has now completed the Master Gardeners program.

“MENTORING IS JUST LIKE GARDENING. YOU PLANT SEEDS. YOU NURTURE. BUT AT A CERTAIN POINT, YOU HAVE TO LET THE KIDS GROW AND GROWTH TAKES TIME. YOU HAVE TO STEP BACK AND TRUST THE PROCESS.”

Brian's approach to both roles, mentor and gardener, intertwines through metaphors of light and transformation.

“PLANTS NEED LIGHT TO LIVE, BUT THEY ALSO GROW IN THE DARKNESS. I TRY TO HELP THE KIDS STORE LIGHT WITHIN THEMSELVES—TRUTH, LOVE, UNDERSTANDING—SO WHEN DARK TIMES COME, THEY CAN KEEP GROWING.”

Brian's belief in the spiritual dimension of his work is palpable. Whether quoting agricultural metaphors from the Bible or reflecting on a favorite concept—light refracting through a prism—he draws connections between nature, scripture, and the inner lives of young people.

“ONE STUDENT ASKED ME MY FAVORITE PART OF MY JOB. I TOLD HIM: I GET TO SEE THE TALENT OF THE NEXT GENERATION. IT'S LIKE WALKING UP TO FLOWERS THAT HAVEN'T BLOOMED YET—YOU CAN ALREADY TELL THERE'S SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE.”



Today, Brian works closely with community partners including Jefferson County Community Ministries and the Presbyterian Church in Charles Town. His presence at the Farmers Market and growing connection to the Jefferson County Schools—thanks in part to a recommendation from community partner Bob Shefner—is just one of many ways he connects with the broader Charles Town community.

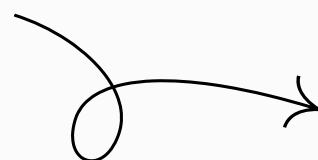
“If there's one thing I've learned,” he says, “it's that you can plant a hundred seeds in a day. But they won't all bloom at the same time. You have to trust the timing.”



Looking ahead, he hopes to deepen his work in Jefferson County schools and continue planting seeds of curiosity, confidence, and character in the young people he serves.

“MY ONLY MISSION IS TO CONNECT THE PEOPLE TO THE LIGHT.”

Meet the rest of our team!

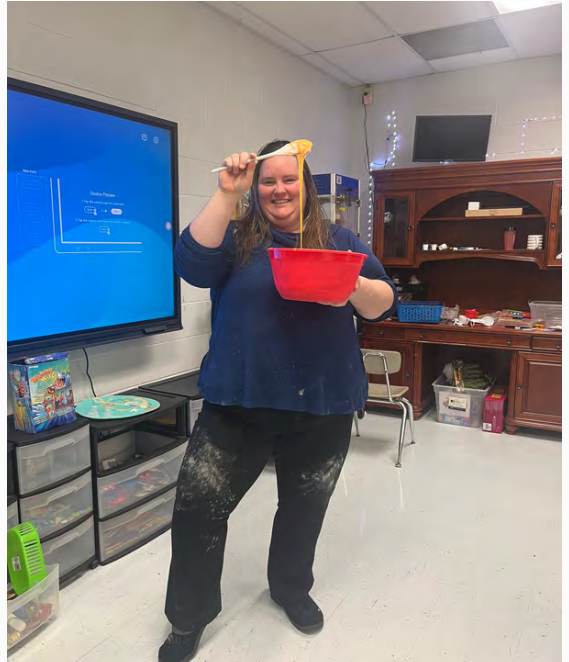


MEET OUR TEAM

Danielle Baker: School Social Worker

This school year marks an exciting new chapter for Danielle Baker, who will be based out of Jefferson Community Ministries as she integrates into Charles Town Middle School as a school-based social worker. Danielle is eager to embed herself in the school community, just as she has in past roles.

A seasoned social worker, Danielle previously served students at Eagle School Intermediate and North Middle in Berkeley County, where she learned the importance of building trust, one relationship at a time. She recalls a favorite moment when a student brought a struggling classmate to her office, saying, “He’s having a bad day, and I told him you’re a good person to come talk to.” Those connections and the “aha” moments when something finally clicks are what inspire her most.



Danielle’s background also includes teaching social-emotional learning at Charles Town Middle, as well as working at Grafton Residential Treatment Center with teenage girls. One former client surprised her years later with a hug and a heartfelt message:

“EVEN WHEN YOU THOUGHT I WASN’T LISTENING, I WAS LISTENING.”

These experiences have strengthened her belief that even small interactions can plant seeds that grow over time. Now, Danielle is taking on the challenge of building relationships from the ground up in a new county—one where The Charles Town Initiative is still introducing itself.



“IN BERKELEY COUNTY, OUR TEAM WORKED HARD TO BUILD TRUST WITH SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY. NOW WE GET TO SHOW JEFFERSON COUNTY WHY WE’RE NEEDED HERE TOO.”

Outside of work, Danielle enjoys reading, coached basketball and once played as a center/power forward, and used to spend weekends saltwater fishing. Above all, she’s excited to work alongside the Jefferson County staff and start this new chapter of impact, connection, and joy.

CANNABIS POISONINGS ARE RISING – WHAT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS NEED TO KNOW

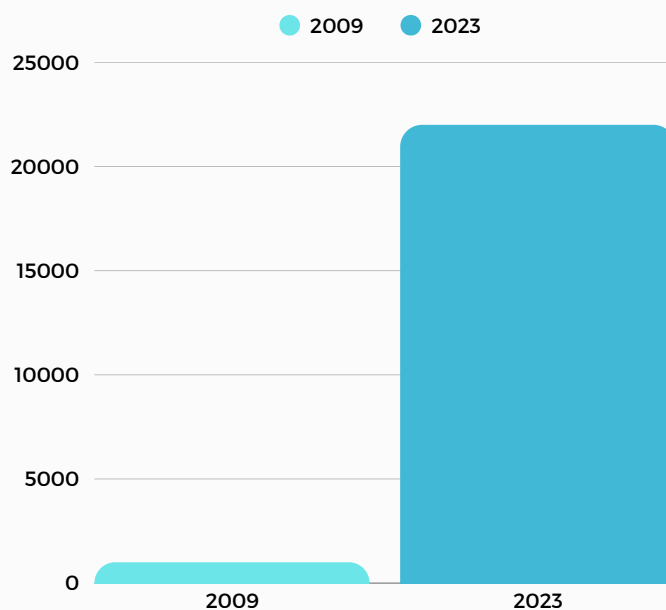
As cannabis products — especially colorful gummies, chocolates, and baked goods — become more common in homes, hospitals across the U.S. are seeing a sharp rise in accidental poisonings. The most alarming trend? Most of the cases involve children and teenagers.



In 2009, poison control centers logged fewer than 1,000 cannabis-related cases. Last year, there were more than 22,000 — and over 75% involved kids or teens. Many children suffered nausea, vomiting, paranoia, hallucinations, seizures, or dangerous breathing problems. More than 100 children required ventilators.

These incidents often happen when children mistake cannabis edibles for regular snacks or candy. In one Ohio case, several fourth graders ate marijuana gummies brought from home, each containing 50 milligrams of THC — a dose far too high for a child. One girl hallucinated that aliens had invaded her school. She recovered physically, but the emotional impact lingered.

Cannabis Poisoning Cases in the US



Children are especially vulnerable because their smaller bodies require much less THC to cause severe symptoms. Packaging that mimics regular candy or baked goods can make the risk even higher. Older adults are also at risk, particularly if they take medications or are unfamiliar with the higher potency of today's cannabis products.

Signs and Symptoms

If you think a child in your care is acting unusual or looks ill, act immediately. Check if the child may have consumed anything containing cannabis. The severity of symptoms depends on the child's size and the amount consumed. Look for:

- Vomiting
- Confusion
- Unresponsiveness
- Slurred speech
- Unsteadiness on feet
- Drowsiness/lethargy
- Slowed breathing
- Seizures (in rare cases)



Prevention Tips for Families

- If you have them, store cannabis products securely — locked up and out of sight. Keep these products in child-resistant packaging and away from regular snacks.
- Talk to older children and teens about the dangers of taking any substance without knowing what's in it.
- If you suspect a child has ingested cannabis, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 or seek medical help immediately.

While most people use cannabis without serious problems, these products can be dangerous in the wrong hands — especially small ones. Awareness and safe storage can prevent frightening, and sometimes life-threatening, emergencies.

Read
MORE

SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH: ALARMING (BUT NOT SURPRISING) CONNECTIONS REVEALED IN NEW NATIONAL SURVEY

The latest findings from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reveal a troubling but important truth: substance use and mental health challenges often go hand-in-hand, especially among youth and young adults.



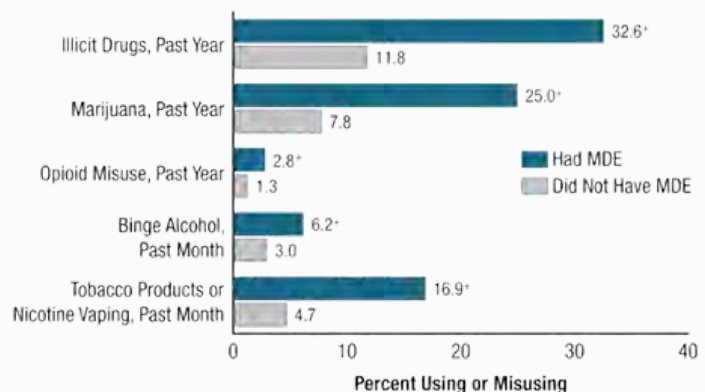
In 2024, more than half (58.3%) of Americans aged 12 and older reported using tobacco, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month. Marijuana remained the most commonly used illicit substance, with 22.3% reporting past-year use—rising to 35% among young adults aged 18 to 25. Opioid misuse affected 7.8 million people, most of whom misused prescription pain relievers. Alarmingly, 48.4 million people aged 12 or older (nearly one in six) had a substance use disorder in the past year.

BUT THE MOST URGENT FINDING IS THE POWERFUL LINK BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE.

Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 with a major depressive episode (MDE), substance use was dramatically higher than their peers without depression:

- 32.6% used illicit drugs (vs. 11.8%)
- 25.0% used marijuana (vs. 7.8%)
- 16.9% vaped or used tobacco (vs. 4.7%)
- 6.2% engaged in binge drinking (vs. 3.0%)

Past Year or Past Month Substance Use: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; by Past Year Major Depressive Episode (MDE) Status, 2024



Teens with moderate or severe anxiety showed similar trends:

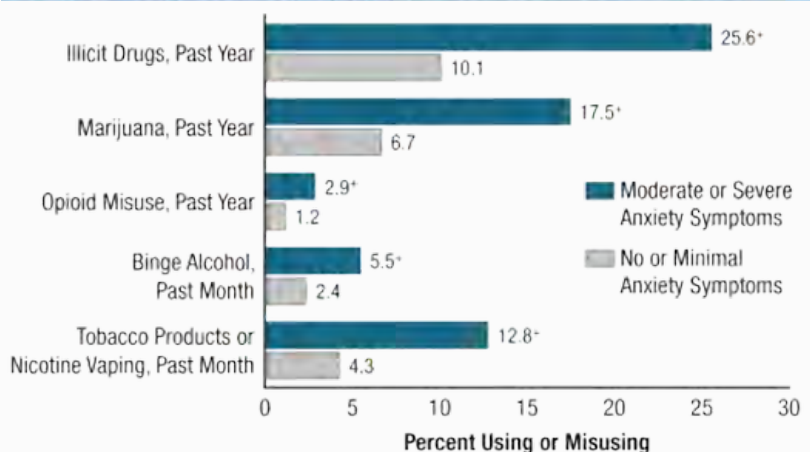
- 25.6% used illicit drugs (vs. 10.1%)
- 17.5% used marijuana (vs. 6.7%)
- 12.8% vaped or used tobacco (vs. 4.3%)

The pattern continues into adulthood. Adults aged 18 or older with serious mental illness were significantly more likely to:

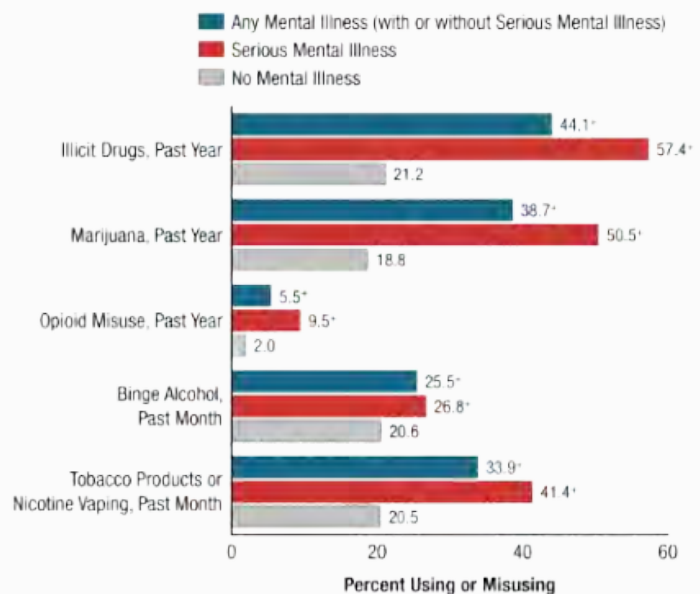
- Use illicit drugs (57.4%) compared to those without mental illness (21.2%)
- Misuse opioids (9.5% vs. 2.0%)
- Vape or use tobacco (41.4% vs. 20.5%)

THESE FINDINGS UNDERSCORE A REALITY THAT THE CHARLES TOWN INITIATIVE SEES EVERY DAY: ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IS ESSENTIAL TO PREVENTING SUBSTANCE USE.

Past Year or Past Month Substance Use: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; by Severity of Anxiety Symptoms in the Past 2 Weeks, 2024



Past Year or Past Month Substance Use: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older; by Level of Mental Illness, 2024



Our school- and community-based programs prioritize early intervention, trauma-informed support, and mental wellness. Through mentoring, education, and partnerships with mental health professionals, we're building resilience in youth before substance use begins.

As we continue our work, these national trends confirm what we know locally: to prevent substance use, we must also treat the pain that drives it. Together, let's continue investing in programs that make our community members feel safe, supported, and seen.

CALL FOR MENTORS!

We are seeking volunteer mentors to support students!



HELP STUDENTS

What will mentors do?

- Build positive relationships
- Meet with students at least once a week for thirty minutes
- Improve academic performance
- Build life skills

Please contact:

Meagan Vindivich
304-268-2763
meagan.vindivich@wvesc.org

 SAVE A LIFE
FREE NALOXONE DAY
Jefferson County

Sept. 25, 2025
10 am – 5 pm

JUST STOP BY any location for a free naloxone (Narcan) kit and training. It only takes a few minutes to learn how to save a life.

✦ **Jefferson County Community Ministries**

238 W. Washington St.
Charles Town

✦ **Shepherd University Knutti Hall**

102 E. High St.
Shepherdstown

✦ **7-Eleven**

49 Patrick Henry Way
Charles Town

✦ **Appalachian Trail Conservancy**

799 Washington St.
Harper's Ferry

✦ **Black Dog Coffee**

8001 Charles Town Rd.
Shenandoah Junction



Narcan saves lives!

 **bit.ly/EPSSaveALifeDay** 



Why You Should Talk With Your Child About Alcohol and Other Drugs

Parents Have a Significant Influence in Their Children's Decisions to Experiment With Alcohol and Other Drugs

One of the most influential factors during a child's adolescence is maintaining a strong, open relationship with a parent.¹ When parents create supportive and nurturing environments, children make better decisions. Though it may not always seem like it, children really hear their parents' concerns, which is why it's important that parents discuss the risks of using alcohol and other drugs.

It's Better to Talk Before Children Are Exposed to Alcohol and Other Drugs

If you talk to your kids directly and honestly, they are more likely to respect your rules and advice about alcohol

and drug use. When parents talk with their children early and often about alcohol and other drugs, they can protect their children from many of the high-risk behaviors associated with using these drugs.



Some Children May Try Alcohol or Other Drugs at a Very Young Age

It is never too early to talk to your children about alcohol and other drugs. Children as young as nine years old already start viewing alcohol in a more positive way, and approximately 3,300 kids as young as 12 try marijuana each day.² Additionally, about

five in 10 kids as young as 12 obtain prescription pain relievers for nonmedical purposes.³ The earlier you start talking, the better.

The Older Kids Get, the More Likely They'll Try Alcohol or Drugs

About 10 percent of 12-year-olds say they have tried alcohol, but by age 15, that number jumps to 50 percent. Additionally, by the time they are seniors, almost 70 percent of high school students will have tried alcohol, half will have taken an illegal drug, and more than 20 percent will have used a prescription drug for a nonmedical purpose.⁴ The sooner you talk to your children about alcohol and other drugs, the greater chance you have of influencing their decisions about drinking and substance use.⁵

Not Talking About Alcohol and Other Drugs Still Sends Kids a Message

Kids don't always have all the facts when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. If parents don't talk about the risks of underage drinking and substance use, their kids might not see any harm in trying

alcohol and other substances. Having a conversation allows parents to set clear rules about what they expect from their kids when it comes to alcohol and other drugs.

References

- ¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). *Young children develop in an environment of relationships*. Working Paper No. 1. From <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2004/04/Young-Children-Develop-in-an-Environment-of-Relationships.pdf> (accessed June 19, 2018).
- ² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2018). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. SMA 18-5068, NSDUH Series H-53)*. Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- ³ Lipari, R. N., & Hughes, A. (2017). *The CBHSQ Report: How people obtain the prescription pain relievers they misuse*. Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- ⁴ Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Miech, R. A., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2014). *Monitoring the Future national results on drug use: 1975–2013: Overview, Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use*. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *The Surgeon General's call to action to prevent and reduce underage drinking: A guide to action for educators*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General.