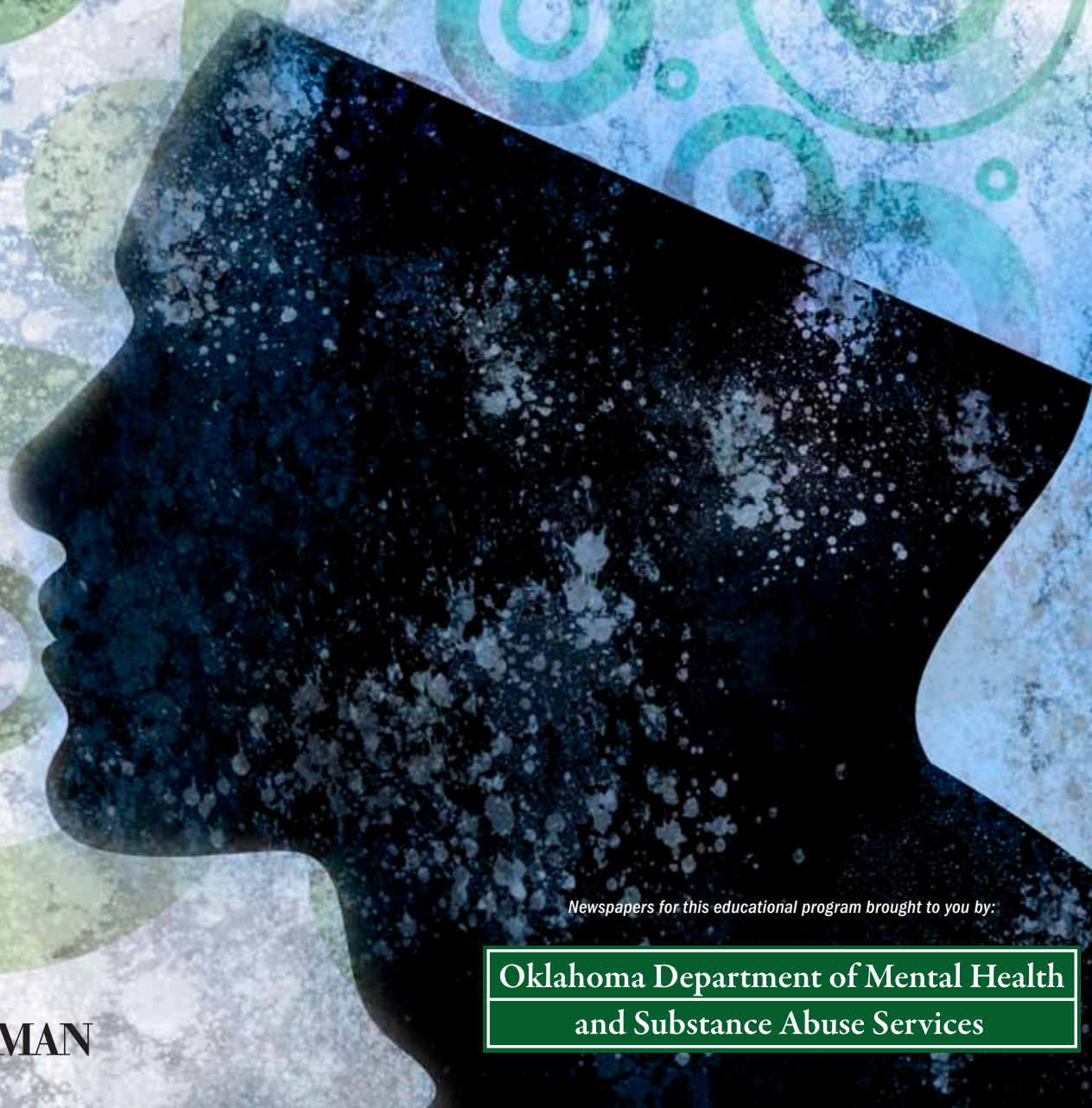




educational program

Student Supplement



Newspapers for this educational program brought to you by:



Oklahoma Department of Mental Health
and Substance Abuse Services

Table Of Contents



The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and *The Oklahoman* feel that it is crucial that you gain an understanding of mental health and how it may affect YOU.

In this educational supplement, you will find four sections, each with several activities for you to learn from, on the following topics:

Overviewpages 2–4

1) Mental Illness.....pages 5–10

- Building Blocks..... page 5
- Stigma page 6
- Signs and Symptoms page 7
- Suicide..... page 8
- Treatment..... page 9
- Biological Factors page 10
- Brain Activity..... page 10

2) Alcohol and Other Drugspages 11–17

- Building Blocks..... page 11
- Prevalence page 12
- Signs and Symptoms page 13
- Drug Climate..... page 14
- Bodily Harm pages 15–17

3) Childhood Traumas.....pages 18–24

- Building Blocks..... page 18
- Risk Factors..... pages 19–20
- Other Causes..... page 21
- Reactions..... page 22
- Theory..... page 23
- Oklahoma City Bombing page 24

4) Coping Skills.....pages 25–31

- Building Blocks..... page 25
- Stress Details..... page 26
- Measuring Stress..... page 27
- Find Your Stress Level pages 28–30
- Coping Methods..... page 31



Sources

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
The Oklahoman
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology
American Psychiatric Association
Central Oklahoma Turning Point
Focus Adolescent Services
National Drug Intelligence Center
National Institutes of Health
National Institute of Mental Health
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
National Survey on Drug Use and Health
Oklahoma Governor’s and Attorney General’s Blue Ribbon Task Force
Oklahoma Kids Count
Oklahoma Partnership for Children’s Behavioral Health
Pennsylvania Driving Under the Influence Association
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center Department of Pediatrics

What is mental health?

You might be wondering if mental health affects your life — or you might not be thinking about it at all. But if you or anyone you know copes with these issues, among others, then mental health issues are closer to you than you think.

- Alcohol and Other Drug Use
- Anxiety
- Anorexia
- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism
- Bipolar Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Bulimia
- Childhood Trauma
- Depression
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Panic Attacks
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Schizophrenia
- Social Phobias

You'll soon learn why ailments like these with physical symptoms are really mental health issues.

Moreover, the term “mental health” doesn't always imply that an illness is involved. All individuals can be aware of their mental health by being proactive to keep their minds and attitudes healthy, just the way you eat right and exercise to keep the rest of your body healthy.

Why should I care?

Mental health problems pose a great challenge to many people across America.

- About 57 million Americans suffer from a mental illness.
- It is disabling for one out of every 17 people.
- That makes mental illness the leading cause of disability in the United States for individuals between the ages of 15 and 44.
- Nearly half of individuals with one mental illness also have at least one other mental disorder.
- The economic burden of mental illness in the United States is greater than the burden of cancer.

Summary

Now you know why mental health is so important on a national scale, but you still may not know why it's so important in your state, in your city, in your school and in your classroom. Consider these examples — they are fictional students, but they represent scenarios that face real youths in Oklahoma.



Loretta is a 15-year-old freshman at a small, rural high school. She feels relaxed when she's taking care of her family's horses or curled up with a book, but she is constantly anxious when she is around other people. She tries to hide that she eats very little because she does not want other girls to think she is overweight, even though she is healthy for her age and body type. She also makes good grades but is afraid to speak up in class, always paranoid that she will be ridiculed if her answer is wrong. Loretta might seem like the shy girl of the class to others, but inside she is facing daily mental health struggles.

Jackson is a ten-year-old fifth-grade student at a school in a big city. He loves to play football and idolizes his older brother, who plays football on a high school junior varsity team. Jackson also enjoys science because he likes the hands-on experiments. Jackson's father is an alcoholic, though, and on occasion makes a scene at his and his brother's football games in front of others, and makes a scene at home by hitting his mother when he is under the influence of alcohol. Jackson may look like just another kid who loves football and science, but his home life puts him at higher risk for developing mental health problems later in life.



Getting Help

It's okay to ask for help. You wouldn't think about avoiding the doctor if you thought you had the flu, because you know the doctor can help you get back on your feet. The same is true of your mental health — if something doesn't seem right, you need to talk to a health professional.

State and federal laws bar health professionals from sharing information about patients, including patients seeking treatment for their mental health, so no one even has to know you're getting help unless you tell them. Here are some hotlines you can reach out to:



What is mental illness?

Mental illness is a health condition that affects a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors to varying degrees. It is a condition diagnosed by a health professional.

How many people have a mental illness?

As many as 10.4 percent of Oklahomans suffer from severe effects of a mental illness — the highest rate among states in the U.S. The national average is 7.4 percent. In fact, about one out of every four adults has or knows someone with a mental illness, and one in five youths under age 18 is in some way affected by mental illness.

Can you put a cost on mental illness?

Yes. More than \$1.5 billion a year nationally is funneled to mental illness needs in the healthcare system, the criminal justice system, social and human services, education and nonprofit organizations.



What is a stigma?

A stigma is a negative attitude projected onto a person or group of people based on preconceived prejudices. The stigma and the disgrace or discredit it can cause may keep a person or group from being fully accepted.

How do stigmas affect people with mental illness?

Stigmas can be as disabling to people with a mental illness as the illness itself because the negative stigma associated with such an illness may keep people from seeking the treatment they need to regain their health.

How can people fight this stigma?

The way to turn around a stigma is to learn more about mental illness. The truth is that mental illness is not something people can “snap out of” or something that makes them “crazy.”

Activity:

Think of phrases you have said or heard that might upset someone with a mental illness. List some phrases you could say instead in a similar situation in the future.

What are the risk factors for developing a mental illness?

The risk factors vary depending on the type of mental illness.

What are some examples?

Here are the risk factors for depression, which is the leading cause of disability worldwide.

1) Occurrence of Disease in Family

Yes — History of depression in the family increases one's risk.

2) Gender

Yes — It's more common in females.

3) Smoking

Yes — Smoking also increases one's risk.

4) Stressful Life Events

Yes — Ending a romantic relationship, losing a family member or friend and experiencing abuse or violence are all risk factors.

5) Age

No — Depression can strike at any age.

What are some key symptoms of depression?

- Sudden change in personality or eating and sleeping patterns
- Lingering apathy or tiredness
- Talking about suicide
- Excessive anxiety
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- In children, other warning signs include aggressive behavior, delayed development and hyperactivity

Activity:

Depression is one type of mental illness. Others include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Form groups of four and have each member research one of those illnesses. Then share with each other how the risk factors and symptoms differ.

How many young adults die by suicide in Oklahoma?

According to the U.S. Census, suicide is the third leading cause of death in the state for people ages 15 to 24. In 2000, 29 Oklahomans under age 20 took their own lives.

How many young adults die by suicide nationally?

Nationally, one person 24 years old or younger dies of suicide every two hours, and it is estimated that there are 25 suicide attempts for every suicide completion.

What trends are related to suicides?

1) Geography

Suicide rates are slightly higher in rural counties in Oklahoma.

2) Race

American Indians have the highest suicide rate for children younger than 15. Caucasians have the highest rate for youths at least 15 years old.

3) Lifestyle

One in every three suicides involves alcohol among youths 14 years old and above.

Activity:

Write a letter to the editor of *The Oklahoman* sharing your thoughts on the prevalence and prevention opportunities related to adolescent suicides in Oklahoma. You may choose to submit your letter for consideration for publication.

How is mental illness treated?

Mental illnesses can't be cured, but they can be managed. The most common treatment options are medication and psychotherapy.

What are the consequences of not receiving treatment?

The costs of not seeking treatment are substantial. Students with an untreated mental illness may fall behind in school and are at higher risk later in life for health problems and unhealthy interpersonal relationships. Moreover, businesses lose about \$23 billion every year because of absenteeism and decreased productivity due to depression among employees.

Is it only adults that forego treatment?

No. About one-third of people under age 18 with a severe mental illness are not receiving treatment.

Activity:

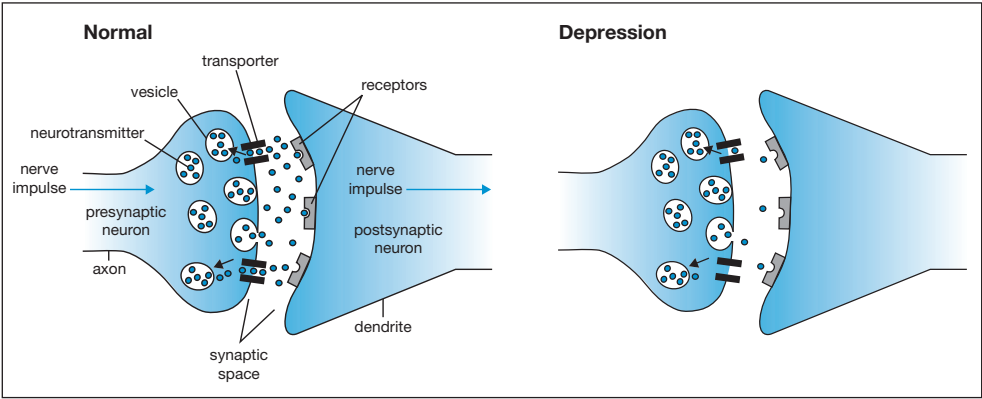
Imagine a friend revealed mental health struggles but said he or she didn't plan to get treatment. Write a persuasive essay you could give to the friend convincing him or her to seek help.

Mental Illness: Biological Factors



What causes mental illness?

Although genetic, environmental and social factors are all causal influences on mental illness, the ultimate cause is biological. There is a physical cause for mental illness just like for diseases such as diabetes and cancer.



How does mental illness look in the body?

Neurons like these transmit messages to the brain through electrical and chemical processes. In mental illnesses, the balance of neurochemicals — chemicals in the brain — changes. For instance, lesser amounts of the chemical serotonin are released in the brains of people with depression. Serotonin helps regulate people’s moods.

Activity:

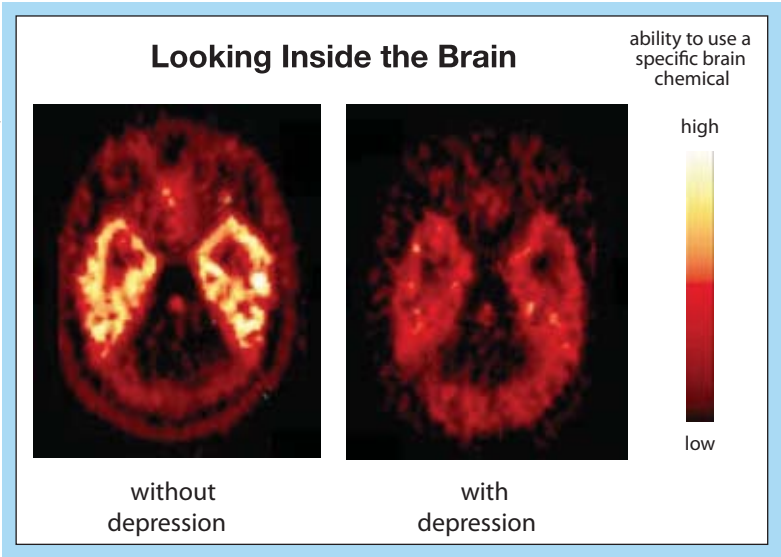
Talk to your family members about what they think causes mental illness. If they don’t answer by talking about the biological cause, teach them what you have learned.

Mental Illness: Brain Activity

Can health professionals see this happen in the brain?

Actually, yes. They use Positron Emission Tomography, or PET, to measure brain activity. Other imaging techniques can also be used, such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or MRI.

What does a PET image look like?



Activity:

True or False: The only organ mental illness affects is the brain. Explain your answer.

What is substance abuse?

Substance abuse refers to the excessive use of and/or dependence on alcohol or other drugs, often impairing an individual's ability to function normally and maintain healthy relationships with others.

What sort of financial toll does alcohol and other drug use take?

More than 10 percent of the state government's budget will go toward issues related to alcohol and other drug use. There's also a toll on the household level, such as the money spent on alcohol and other drugs that could be spent on other family expenses; the money lost in wages when a family member's alcohol or other drug use affects his or her ability to work; and the money spent in obtaining treatment and counseling for all family members and managing health conditions caused by the use of alcohol and other drugs. There are emotional costs as well, such as childhood trauma, which is discussed later on.

What are indirect costs of alcohol and other drug use?

There are severe societal consequences of the use of alcohol and other drugs. In Oklahoma, 85 percent of murders, 80 percent of incarcerations, 75 percent of divorces, 65 percent of child abuse cases, 55 percent of domestic disturbances, half of traffic deaths and 33 percent of suicides can all be traced to the use of alcohol and other drugs.



Alcohol and Other Drugs: Prevalence

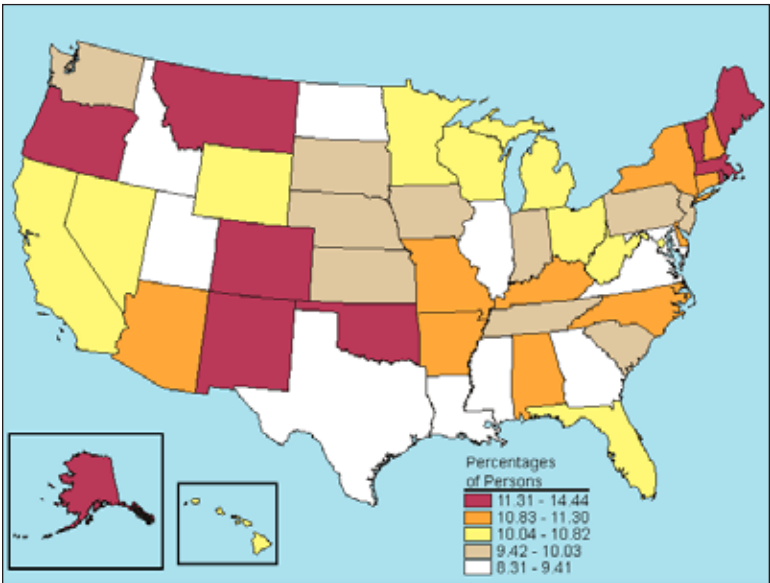
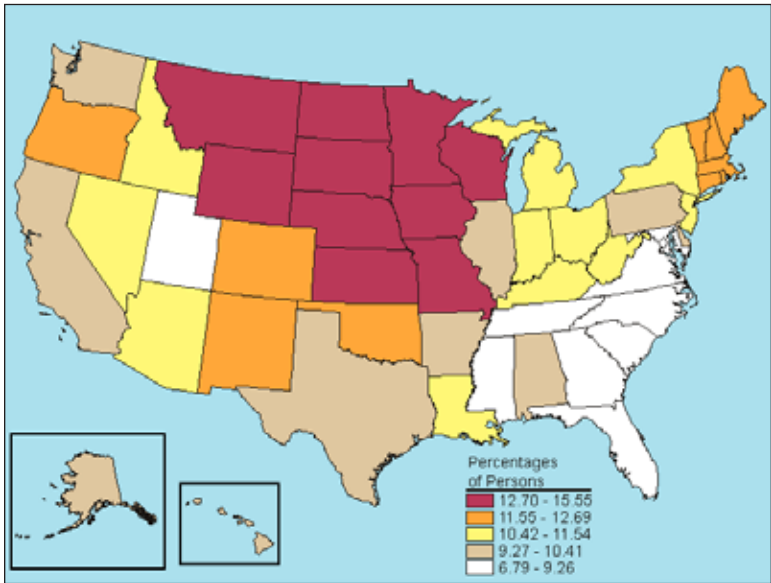


How many Oklahomans struggle with alcohol and other drugs?

About 161,000 adults and 20,000 adolescents in Oklahoma need treatment for a problem with their alcohol and other drug use. The numbers who need help for alcohol use outweigh the numbers facing drug addiction by a ratio of 7.5-to-1.

How does that compare to other states?

On the left is a map showing a comparison of the percentage of youths ages 12 to 17 who engaged in binge drinking in the month previous to being surveyed, and on the right is a map showing the same figures but for use of an illicit drug.



Source: Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies

Activity:

A standard drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. Heavy drinking for a male is considered more than two drinks a day on average; it's more than one for a female.

Assume the average drink costs \$3.50. If you're a male, calculate the quantity of alcohol a man age 21 or older who consumes four drinks a day, five days a week drinks over the course of a year, and how much money he would spend on that alcohol. If you're a female, calculate the quantity and cost of alcohol consumed for a woman age 21 or older who imbibes three drinks a day, four days a week over the course of a year.

Quantity of Alcohol _____ Total Cost _____

What else could an adult of legal drinking age spend that amount of money on?



Alcohol and Other Drugs: Signs and Symptoms

What are some signs that identify a person in need of help for alcohol and other drug use?

- The substance is taken in greater quantities or for a longer duration than intended.
- The person is unsuccessful at trying to cut down his or her use of the substance.
- Excessive time is spent getting, taking or recovering from the substance.
- Use of the substance endangers the person during daily activities.
- Interest wanes in former hobbies, social activities, or school or work obligations.
- Tolerance to the substance builds, requiring more and more to have the same affect.

What are some additional signs specific to young adults?

- Significant increase or decrease in sleeping habits and appetite.
- Demands for extreme privacy.
- Frequent shakiness, vomiting or sweating.
- Compulsive need for large sums of money.

How do alcohol and other drugs affect a person's education?

About 6,500 students drop out of Oklahoma colleges every year because of alcohol problems. The number of dropouts approaches the number of all practicing physicians across the state.

Activity:

Visit <http://www.lsb.state.ok.us> and research what legislation was recently passed and recently proposed that relates to the use of alcohol and other drugs. Then use the same site to find out who your elected representatives are and draft a letter to them either advocating or opposing proposed legislation, or proposing your own idea for a bill addressing problems related to alcohol and other drugs.

What drug causes the most problems in Oklahoma?

Methamphetamine is one of the drugs of greatest concern in Oklahoma. Its use has risen over time even as use of heroin and cocaine have dropped and use of marijuana has remained relatively stable. It is undeniably the drug of choice according to treatment centers in the state. Methamphetamine can be produced from some cold medications, which is why many are now sold only from behind pharmacy counters.

What other drugs are prevalent here?

Marijuana is the most commonly abused illegal drug in Oklahoma. The use of prescription drugs in ways other than they are prescribed also is on the rise locally.

Where do the drugs originate?

Many drugs in Oklahoma are smuggled in from Mexico, though some drugs come in from Colombia and some are locally grown. Oklahoma is a popular through-way for drug traffickers, especially in Oklahoma City where Interstate 35 traveling north-south and Interstate 44 traveling east-west follow the same stretch of road.

Activity:

Visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/concern/concern.htm>. Use the “trafficking trends” information for each drug to complete the following chart. Then map your findings on a paper map, a wall map or a classroom globe.

DRUG	ORIGINATION
Cocaine	
Ecstasy	
Heroin	
Hydrocodone	
Inhalants	
LSD	
Marijuana	
Methamphetamine	
OxyContin	
Steroids	

Finally, create a timeline of drug use trends in the U.S. by using information at http://www.deamuseum.org/museum_ida.html as well as other research sources.

How does alcohol affect the body?

In the short term, alcohol causes reduced sensitivity to pain, affects one's vision, and impairs one's ability to drive and make smart decisions. These effects can be enhanced when taken along with other drugs.

What about long-term effects?

In the long term, alcohol use can damage multiple organ systems including the heart, liver and pancreas. These effects can be enhanced when taken along with other drugs.

Are there unique affects on adolescents?

Yes, because adolescents are still developing, they are more susceptible to alcohol's effects. During adolescence the brain undergoes substantial changes in several regions. One is the prefrontal cortex region, which plays a role in part for the ability to learn and remember things and to process emotions. Another is the amygdala, which has the important function of processing emotions and developing responses to stress. Yet another is the hippocampus, which is responsible for learning and memory. Researchers have found that this region of the brain is substantially smaller in young adults who are dependent on alcohol compared to their peers who are not.

Activity:

Divide into two groups in your classroom. Select one side to debate on behalf of the pros of lowering the drinking age to 18 and one side to debate on behalf of keeping the drinking age at 21. Be sure to address scientific evidence in the debate such as alcohol's effect on specific regions of the brain at different age levels and stages of development in young adults below the age of 21.

How do other drugs affect the body?

The following culprits — cocaine, GHB, heroin, inhalants, ketamine, LSD, marijuana, MDMA (ecstasy), methamphetamine, nicotine, PCP, prescription opiates, prescription stimulants, steroids — affect all areas of the body.



1) Cardiovascular system

Abnormal heart rate, heart attacks, collapsed veins and bacterial infections in the heart.

2) Respiratory system

Bronchitis, emphysema and lung cancer and aggravation of asthma symptoms.

3) Gastrointestinal system

Immediate nausea and vomiting, and long-term abdominal pain and liver damage.

4) Musculoskeletal system

Stunted growth and severe muscle cramping as well as muscle weakness.

5) Renal system

Kidney damage and failure, leading to a life on dialysis or an early death.

6) Neurological system

Seizures and stroke, plus overall brain damage that minimizes a person's ability to remember things, pay attention and make decisions.

7) Endocrine and reproductive systems

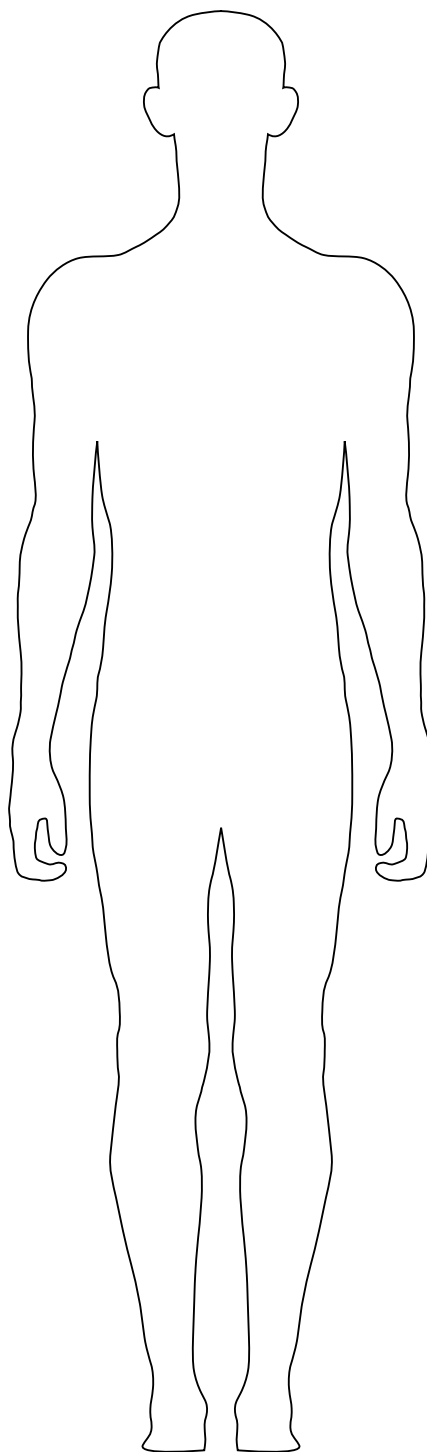
Infertility in men and women, development of masculine features in women, and prenatal problems such as premature birth, miscarriage, low birth weight and mental retardation.

8) Other effects

The practices involved in using drugs — such as sharing needles — expose users to infectious diseases like HIV-AIDS and hepatitis. Withdrawal from using drugs creates health problems as well. Withdrawal can bring about restlessness, mood swings, fatigue, cold flashes, muscle and bone pain, and diarrhea and vomiting.

Activity:

Sketch and/or label the effects of drugs on the different systems of the body.



Childhood Traumas: Building Blocks

What is trauma?

Trauma can be physical or emotional and affects a person's thoughts and actions in a way they would otherwise not exhibit.

What can trauma lead to in the long term?

Trauma can have long-lasting effects such as a disease called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The actions it leads people to can also perpetuate incarceration and poor health habits such as alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide attempts and obesity. Researchers have found, in fact, that the prevalence of childhood trauma is a reliable predictor for social ills. With domestic abuse on the rise in Oklahoma, which can cause both physical and emotional trauma to children, this research does not bode well for the progress of the state.

Why does trauma lead to these problems?

Behaviors that are commonly viewed as problems, such as smoking and overeating, may feel like solutions to people who experienced childhood trauma. Such individuals may find these habits as a way to cope with their feelings.



What are the risk factors for childhood trauma?

The Adverse Childhood Experience Study of Oklahoma, also known just as the ACE Study, identified 10 risk factors. Five are related directly to the child:

1) Emotional Abuse

Being insulted, cursed at or put down, or being spoken to in a way that incites fear of physical harm.

2) Physical Abuse

Being pushed, gripped or targeted with a thrown object, or being hit hard enough to leave a physical mark.

3) Sexual Abuse

Being touched or being forced to touch another in a sexual way.

4) Emotional Neglect

Being responded to in a way that does not make the child feel special, loved, supported or protected.

5) Physical Neglect

Being deprived of necessities like sufficient food and clean clothes, or being uncared for when sick.

What are the other five?

Traumatic events can also occur as a result of dysfunction in the household where the child lives. Here are the other five risk factors for adverse childhood experiences:

1) Mother Treated Violently

Living in a home where the mother was pushed, gripped, hit, bitten, kicked or targeted with a thrown object, or threatened with a weapon.

2) Household Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs

Living in a home with an alcoholic or person using illegal drugs or using legal drugs in a way other than they were prescribed.

3) Household Mental Illness

Living in a home with a depressed or mentally ill person.

4) Parental Separation or Divorce

Living in a home in which the parents were ever separated or divorced.

5) Incarcerated Household Member

Living in a home in which a member of the household ever spent time in prison.

Can children go through more than one trauma?

Yes. If a child does endure a traumatic experience, he or she has an 80 percent likelihood of enduring at least one more.

Activity:

Look for a crime story in *The Oklahoman*. Imagine your friend was connected to the story— maybe his or her parent was the victim or suspect. Write down what you might say to your friend to comfort and support him or her.

[illegible]

Are those 10 categories the only causes of childhood trauma?

No. There are at least three more.

1) Natural disasters

Oklahoma has more disaster declarations per capita than any other state according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Oklahoma is affected by tornadoes, fires, floods, winter storms and, to a lesser extent, earthquakes.

2) War

About 50 Oklahomans have died in the war against terrorism, and there are currently thousands more soldiers from the state serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly 20,000 have served in the Armed Forces since the start of the war in 2001. Many leave behind families with children who must cope with their separation and the added anxiety of the war, and some must cope, too, with the death of their mother or father in the war.

3) Man-made disasters

Events like school shootings can induce childhood trauma. Perhaps the most widely known and studied Oklahoma man-made disaster was the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people, including 19 children.

Activity:

What other natural disasters, wars or man-made disasters can you think of that might have inflicted childhood trauma? List one or two large-scale events (hint: think nationally or globally) and one or two small-scale events (hint: think statewide or citywide). Compare your list with your classmates' after you've all finished.

How do children react to trauma?

Children frequently lose trust in others and fear a traumatic event happening again. Some children consequently turn inward, leading to poor adjustments in social circles later in life, while other children turn outward, leading them to destructive behaviors. Reactions can vary according to the child's culture and age.

When do children react to trauma?

Children can react immediately and/or later in life. Some symptoms may appear immediately, while others may not manifest themselves until the child grows up.

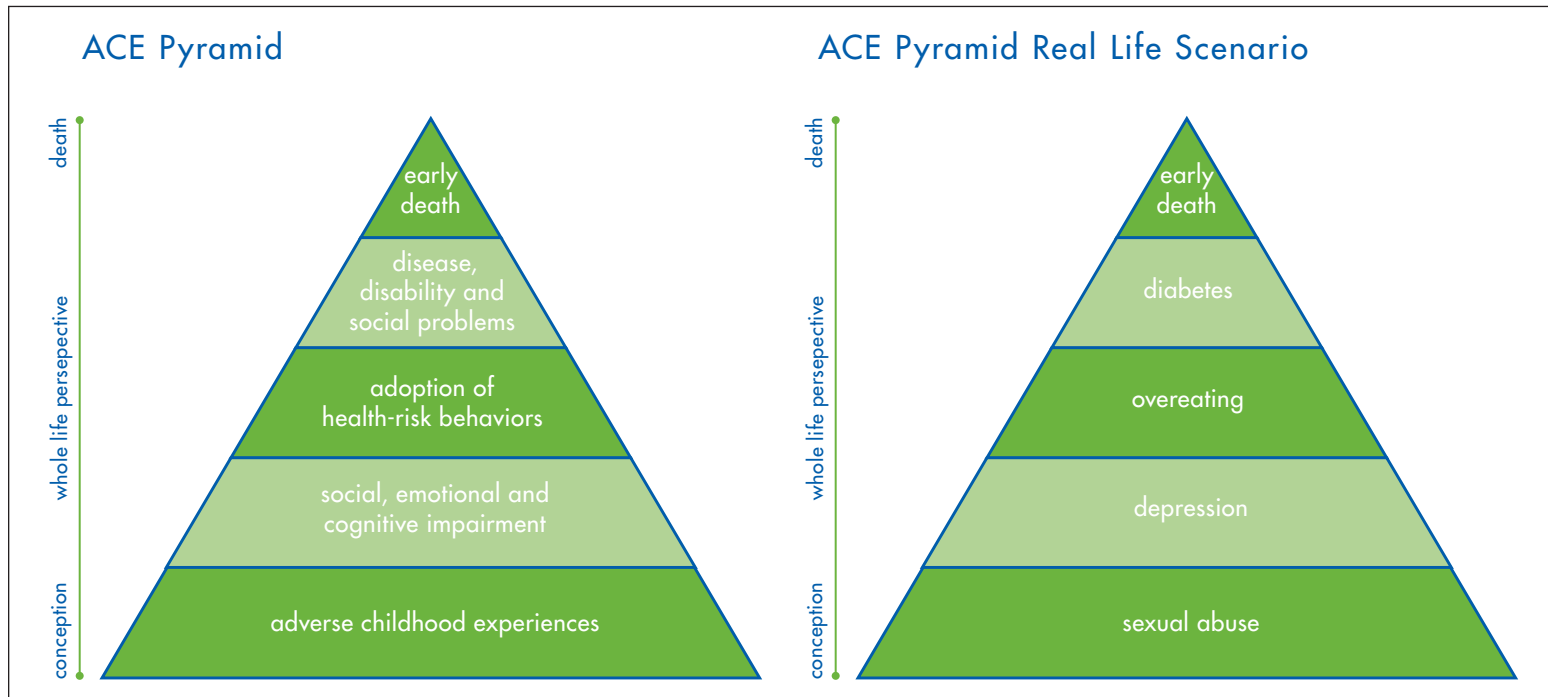
What difference does age make?

Children younger than 6 typically react in some of these ways: crying, clinging to a parent, trembling, becoming lethargic, and reverting to younger behaviors such as thumb-sucking. Children ages 6 to 11 may react by having nightmares, starting fights, isolating themselves, performing poorly in school and complaining of physical ailments. Adolescents ages 12 to 17 are more likely to have flashbacks, avoid reminders of the event, have suicidal thoughts, turn to illegal substances and feel guilty.

Activity:

These symptoms are not always a result of childhood trauma. Write a script and/or act out a skit in which a character displays at least one of these symptoms as a reaction to something clearly caused by something other than a trauma.

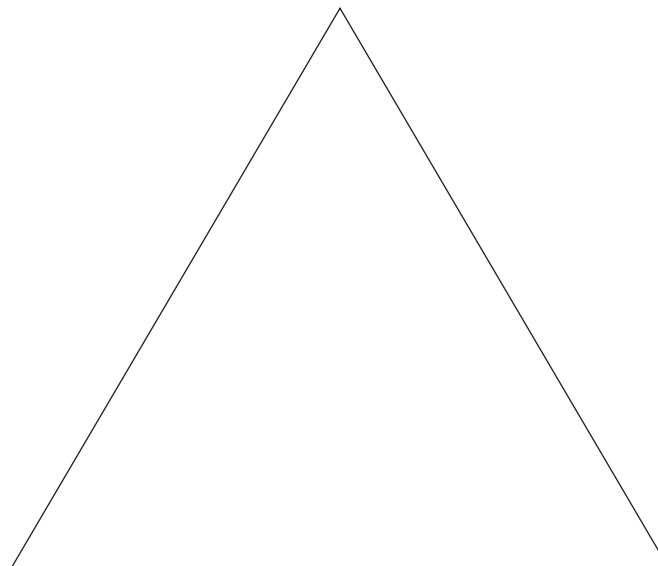
What is the theory used in the ACE Study to explain the effect of childhood trauma?



Source: Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook, 2006–2007

Activity:

Complete this diagram with another string of events that illustrates the ACE Pyramid.



How were children affected by the bombing?

Nineteen infants and young children in a daycare center were among the 168 killed on April 19, 1995, when a terrorist bomb exploded at the Alfred P. Murrah Building in downtown Oklahoma City. More than 200 children lost a parent — some lost both. Another nearly 900 people were injured to varying extents.

How were children treated after the bombing?

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services founded Project Heartland less than a month later, on May 15, 1995. Project Heartland served about 8,800 people before its funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency ended in 1998. Outside funding kept their work going through the trials of bombing suspects Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. Project Heartland provided support services in part to students and staff members at nearby schools immediately after the bombing. Also, school personnel received training the following summer to learn how to help students cope, especially on holidays and anniversaries of the event.

Where are the surviving children now?

Those who lost their parents are young adults now, and the oldest of the six children who survived the blast at the day care, Christopher Nguyen, graduated from high school less than a year ago, in May 2008.

Activity:

Visit <http://newsok.com/article/3238670> to read Christopher Nguyen's story and watch a video of him sharing his thoughts. Then write or draw below or in a private journal to express your own feelings.

What is stress?

Stress is a pressure to execute a task under high expectations and/or in an unreasonably short time frame, or to endure and adapt to a sudden and/or particularly adverse change in one's life.

Is all stress bad?

No. "Bad" stress is called distress, and "good" stress is called eustress. Distress can lead to detrimental emotional and physical effects on the body. Intense or unresolved distress can cause frustration and unhappiness. On the other hand, eustress can motivate and energize a person, providing bursts of creativity and productivity.

What causes stress?

Changes in a person's environment can elicit stressful situations. Causes of stress can happen at school — such as an important exam; at home — such as a fight among parents or siblings; and at leisure activities — such as a competitive soccer match. Some events are likely to be more stressful than others. For instance, learning a family member has a terminal illness will be more stressful than concern over a pop quiz in class. Individuals' responses to stress also vary depending on the personality and other environmental factors surrounding each person.



What does stress look like?

There are three phases of adapting to a stressful situation.

1) Alarm

Energy drops temporarily as a person registers and processes the event and its potential implications.

2) Adaptation

Energy increases sharply to above normal levels to respond to a situation. Responses can range from fighting to freezing to sharply enhancing concentration.

3) Exhaustion

Energy drops permanently once all inner resources are fatigued.

Activity:

Write or illustrate a fictional story in which a character goes through all three stages of stress.

Can you measure stress?

Yes. The Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale outlined in 1967 by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe measures stress. According to the scale, each life event is associated with a certain number of Life Change Units — a stress value.

How much is too much?

A score of 300 or higher is considered high. In fact, a score above 300 can predict an 80 percent chance of developing a serious illness within two years, making the test a useful predictor of the risk of disease. A score between 150 and 300 suggests a 51 percent chance of becoming seriously ill, and a score below 150, indicating a low stress level, suggests a 37 percent chance of that happening.

Are the stress values the same for each person?

While the Life Change Units are the same within each test — there are separate tests for youths and for adults — different people may handle that stress differently. For instance, even though a score of 250 is considered high, people with a score of 150 may feel overstressed if they cannot cope well with the changing situations in their lives.

Activity:

Write in a private journal over the course of a week documenting what stressful events occur in your life each day and how much stress you feel on a scale of 1 to 10. Do a personal evaluation to determine if you might be overreacting to certain events. If so, you may find the lessons on page 31 particularly helpful.

Coping Skills: Find Your Stress Level



Activity:

Below is a modified version of the Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale for youths. Check the boxes of events that have been a factor in your life in the last 12 months and then determine your score. You should not compare scores out of respect for your and your classmates' privacy. You should share your score with a trusted adult such as a parent or school counselor if you are concerned about the result.

EVENT	VALUE	✓	YOUR VALUE
Death of parent or boyfriend/girlfriend	100		
Divorce of your parents	65		
Pregnancy (or causing pregnancy)	65		
Breakup with boyfriend/girlfriend	60		
Jail term or probation	60		
Death of family member (other than parent or boyfriend/girlfriend)	60		
Serious personal injury or illness	45		
Entering college or beginning next level of school (starting middle or high school)	45		
Change in independence or responsibility	45		
Any drug and/or alcohol use	45		
Fired at work or expelled from school	45		
Change in alcohol or drug use	45		
Reconciliation with family or boyfriend/girlfriend (getting back together)	40		

Trouble at school	40		
Serious health problem of a family member	40		
Working while attending school	35		
Working more than 40 hours per week	35		
Changing course of study	35		
Change in frequency of dating	35		
Gain of new family member (new baby born or parent remarries)	35		
Change in work responsibilities	35		
Change in financial state	30		
Death of a close friend (not a family member)	30		
Change to a different kind of work	30		
Change in number of arguments with family or friends	30		
Sleep less than 8 hours per night	25		
Trouble with boyfriend's/girlfriend's family	25		
Outstanding personal achievement (awards, grades, etc.)	25		
Parents start or stop working	20		

Coping Skills: Find Your Stress Level continued



Begin or end school	20		
Change in living conditions (visitors in home, remodeling house, change in roommates)	20		
Change in personal habits (start or stop a habit like smoking or dieting)	20		
Chronic allergies	20		
Trouble with the boss	20		
Change in work hours	15		
Change in residence	15		
Change to a new school (other than graduation)	10		
Change in religious activity	15		
Going in debt (your family)	10		
Change in frequency of family gatherings	10		
Vacation	10		
Presently in winter holiday season	10		
Minor violation of the law	5		
YOUR TOTAL STRESS LEVEL			

Can individuals reduce their stress level, even if they experience stressful events?

Yes! There are many ways to decrease stress by practicing coping techniques that can help individuals modify their behavioral reaction to stress. Here are some behaviors to try.

- Practice expressing your feelings in a calm manner by articulating how you feel.
- Practice slow, measured breathing techniques.
- Practice relaxing your muscles. Focus on relaxing specific muscles one at a time.
- Practice handling a situation you know causes you stress.
- Practice looking at stressful situations in new ways, such as by breaking down large tasks into smaller ones that seem less stressful.
- Practice replacing negative thoughts with positive ones — look at the glass as half-full instead of half-empty.
- Practice other hobbies that help you personally relax, such as performing an instrument, creating an artwork, reading a book or playing with a pet.
- Practice being a positive influence on your friends. Helping them cope with stress will teach you how to cope with stress.
- Practice a healthy lifestyle by eating healthy meals at regular intervals, limiting caffeine intake, exercising regularly and avoiding harmful substances.



Newspapers in Education

is one way *The Oklahoman* is showing its commitment to literacy and education in Oklahoma schools. More than 25 educational programs are produced each year including Weather Wise, Native American History and Bedlam Geography.

For more information on educational programs provided by Newspapers in Education, or for information on sponsoring newspapers for students, visit www.newsok.com/nie or call (405) 475-4137.



For more information on mental health and substance abuse, and how to get help, visit:

www.yourlifeoncourse.com