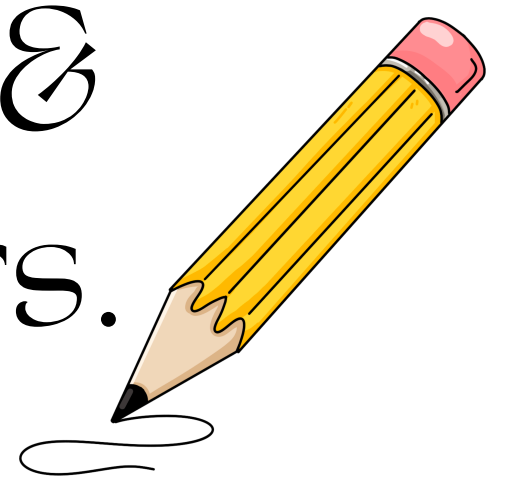




PARENT

Survival Guide

Resources for healthy & safe middle school years.



200 S. Post Rd.
Shelby, NC 28152
(980) 484-5100

2026 Edition

Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer:

This resource guide is designed to provide information about local services, programs, and activities for parents of Cleveland County youth. The inclusion of any organization, agency or service in this guide does not imply an endorsement or recommendation, nor does exclusion imply disapproval. This guide is not intended as a substitute for the medical advice of physicians. Parents and caregivers should consult a physician or other qualified healthcare provider regarding matters related to the health and well-being of children and youth. This guide may reference laws and policies. However, it does not provide legal advice and the information should not be used or relied upon as legal advice. Although this guide provides valuable information, parents remain the first and most important source of information regarding the health and welfare of their children.

Descargo de responsabilidad:

Esta guía de recursos está formateada para brindar información sobre los recursos relacionados con los servicios y actividades locales para los padres de los jóvenes del condado de Cleveland. La inclusión de cualquier organización, agencia o servicio en esta guía no implica respaldo o recomendación, ni la exclusión implica desaprobación. Esta guía no pretende sustituir los consejos médicos de los médicos. Los lectores deben consultar a los médicos en asuntos relacionados con la salud de los niños y los jóvenes. Esta guía puede hacer referencia a leyes y políticas. Sin embargo, no proporciona asesoramiento legal y la información no debe utilizarse ni utilizarse como asesoramiento legal. Aunque esta guía proporciona información valiosa, los padres siguen siendo la primera y más importante fuente de información sobre la salud y el bienestar de sus hijos.

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Health and Wellness

Presenting information about health and wellness is a complex task since the landscape for health is always changing. Health involves not only physical health but also social, emotional and behavioral health of an individual. Other factors, such as access to healthy food, housing, transportation and personal safety influence an individual's health each day. Included in this section is information that is critical for parents to know as well as a list of resources that are available in Cleveland County.

Choosing a healthcare provider for your child is an important task. Factors such as location, office hours, and the type of insurance that the provider accepts weigh into making a choice of provider. Your child should see a healthcare provider annually to keep track of changes in physical, mental and social development and to receive age-appropriate vaccinations. Listed below are the required immunizations for students in North Carolina.

Kindergarten Required Immunizations:

Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis – 5 doses

Polio – 4 doses

MMR – 2 doses

Hepatitis B (HEP B) – 3 doses

Varicella (Chicken Pox) – 2 doses

7th Grade Required Immunizations:

All of the immunizations listed above for kindergarten plus:

Tetanus/Diphtheria/Pertussis (TDAP) 1 dose and Meningococcal Conjugate (MCV) 1 dose

12th Grade Required Immunizations:

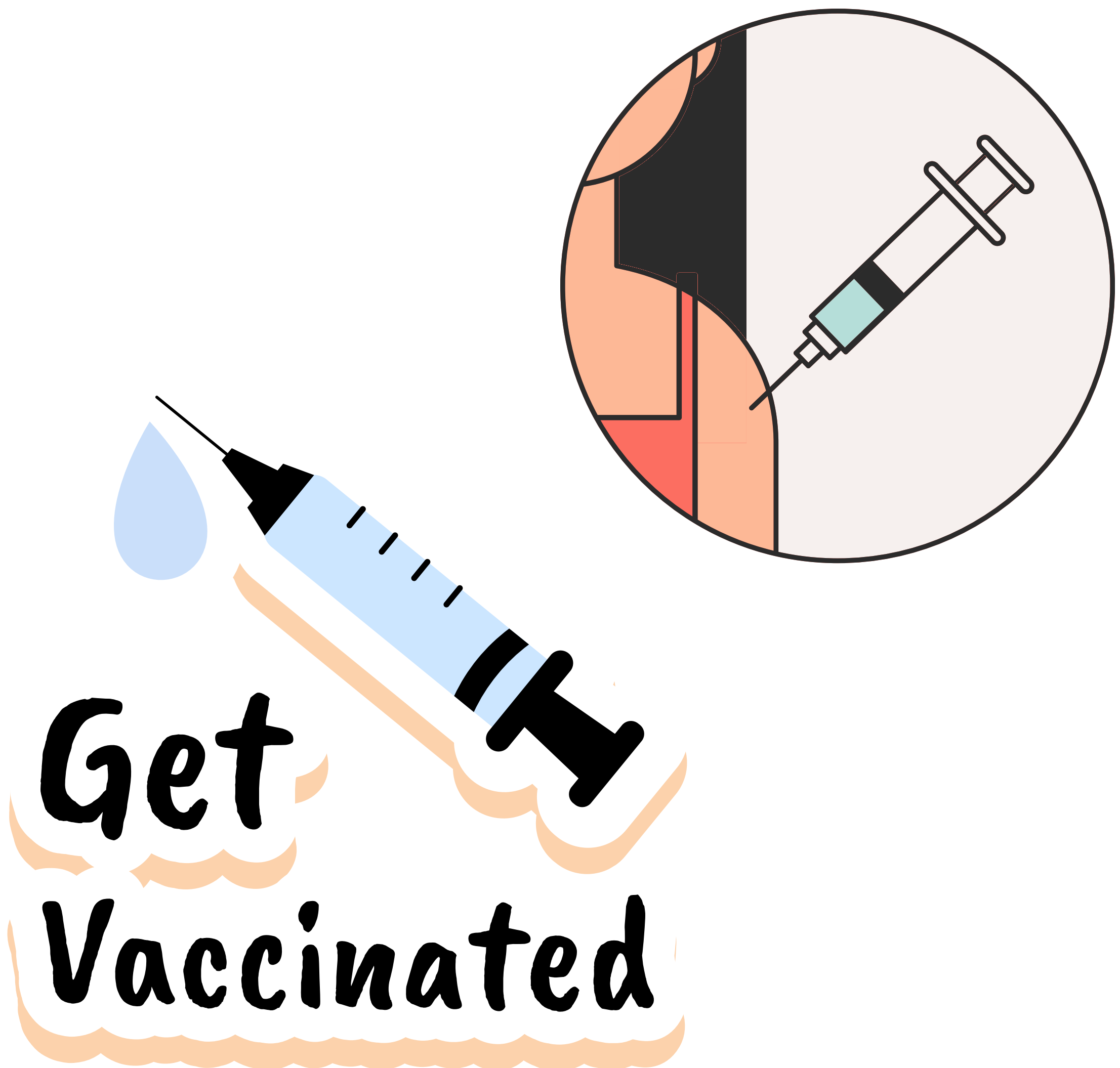
All of the immunizations listed above for kindergarten and 7th grade plus:

Meningococcal Conjugate Booster Dose (MCV)

Health and Wellness Continued

Your child should also get a flu vaccine every year. Not having up to date immunizations can be a determining factor in attending school as well as playing a sport. For additional information, please see <https://immunization.dph.ncdhhs.gov/schools/k-12.htm>

Guidance regarding COVID-19 symptoms, treatment and vaccinations change as new variants of the virus occur. For the most up-to-date information on COVID-19, please go to the website for the Cleveland County Health Department at https://www.clevelandcountyhdc.com/resources/covid_19.php



Health and Wellness Continued

School Health Services

The School Health unit of the Cleveland County Health Department provides nursing services to approximately 14,000 students across 29 school sites in Cleveland County. This group of 20 staff members is comprised of nurses and nurse practitioners. Every school has a nurse assigned to that school. One of the most important responsibilities of School Health staff is to keep students in school!

Pre-K, elementary and intermediate Schools, Turning Point Academy, Cleveland Early College High School and North Shelby School services include the following:

- A RN School Nurse is present at least one or more days every week and by telephone all other days; most of these nurses' travel between two to three schools.
- School nurses provide physical assessment, first aid, case management and information and assistance in preventing the spread of disease.
- School nurses assist school staff members in providing necessary care and accommodations for students as well as serving as a bridge between the school staff and parents.
- School nurses work with Atrium Health to facilitate virtual clinic services for students.

School-based Health Centers are found in the four middle and four high schools in the county. Each middle school has a dedicated nurse with additional training to assess health concerns and provide expanded services. Each high school has a nurse practitioner available 5 days a week to diagnose concerns and provide treatment.

Parental consent is required to participate in school-based health center services.

Health and Wellness Continued

School Health Services

Services include evaluation and treatment, communicable disease prevention, lab tests such as blood glucose, hemoglobin, strep tests and urinalysis, physical examinations, immunizations, medication administration, development of health care plans for students with identified health conditions and education and nutrition counseling. The nurse practitioners educate and train school staff to provide care and supervise in handling health concerns as well as serving as a communication channel with parents. The nurse practitioners also make referrals to appropriate providers.

Virtual Care Services

In collaboration with Atrium Health Levine's Children Telemedicine program and with Cleveland County Schools in K-8 schools, parents have the option to complete an Atrium Telemedicine Parent Consent Form to allow their student to be seen by a medical provider using telemedicine technology. School nurses make referrals to telemedicine when warranted. This allows students to be treated without leaving school in most cases and thus reduces the number of necessary school absences. It also allows parents to attend the visit virtually without leaving work to take their child to the doctor's office.

Parents of Cleveland County School students are asked to submit a Health History Form to the school so that staff are aware of all medical conditions or medications that a student must take. The **Request for Medication To be Given During School Hours** must be completed by a parent/guardian and healthcare provider before a student may be given medication at school. Forms may be obtained from the school nurse or school office.



Health and Wellness Continued

Cleveland County Health Department Resources

Child Health Clinic

The Child Health Clinic offers a full range of medical care for all developmental stages of a child's life from birth to 18 years of age. Visits may include well-child check-ups, sick visits, and immunizations. The clinic accepts many different insurances and will work with patients who need a sliding fee scale based on financial eligibility. Operating hours are 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Services include well-child check-ups, newborn visits and weight checks, immunization visits, annual physicals, daycare entry, Pre-K, kindergarten and sports physicals, sick visits, follow-up visits, treatment and management of childhood illnesses, COVID-19 testing and ADHD services.

To schedule an appointment, please call 980-484-5100.

Dental Clinic

The Dental Clinic's mission is to provide and promote good dental health through education, prevention, and treatment of dental disease. Services provided include dental exams, cleanings, fillings, extractions, fluoride varnish, X-rays, education, limited periodontic services and sealants. Referrals are made to local dental specialty offices as needed for treatment outside the scope of practice offered in the Dental Clinic.

Individuals eligible for service are children ages 0-21 years of age and expecting mothers. Payment sources include Medicaid, NC Health Choice, some private insurance plans (please call for verification) and private pay based on a sliding fee scale. Payment plans are available.

To schedule an appointment for the Dental Clinic, please call 980-484-5261

To learn about additional programs and services offered by the Cleveland County Health Department, please go to www.clevelandcountyhdc.com

Health and Wellness

Continued

Mental and Behavioral Health

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how an individual thinks, feels and acts as they cope with life. It also helps to determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. It is normal for teens to experience mood changes and irritability as they become adults. Sometimes, it is hard to distinguish between mood changes and more serious issues in teens.

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Stress is the body's reaction to a challenge or demand. In short bursts, stress can be positive such as when it helps you avoid danger or meet a deadline. (Medlineplus.gov) Some forms of stress include being bullied, relationship stress, school or work issues and busy schedules. Some ways to cope with stress include talking to a trusted friend or counselor, deep breathing exercises, physical activity, writing in a journal, or getting some rest.

Anxiety and occasional fear are normal parts of life. An individual may feel anxious before taking a test or making a big decision. This kind of anxiety is useful because it can make you more alert or careful. But for millions of people who have an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away, and it gets worse over time. Individuals with an anxiety disorder may experience things such as feeling restless, wound-up or on edge, chest pain and shortness of breath, extreme fatigue, excessive worrying, irritability, having muscle tension, trembling, sweating, difficulties concentrating or problems falling asleep. These symptoms can have a big impact on daily life. Treatments for anxiety disorders include medication and therapy.



Health and Wellness

Continued

Mental and Behavioral Health

Depression is a common but serious mood disorder. Depression in teens can come with different behaviors that are typically seen in adults such as:

- Irritable or angry mood rather than sadness – a depressed teen may be grumpy, easily frustrated, or prone to outbursts.
- Unexplained aches and pains – depressed teens frequently complain about physical ailments such as headaches or stomachaches.
- Extreme sensitivity to criticism – depressed teens are plagued by feelings of worthlessness which makes them vulnerable to criticism, rejection and failure. This is a particular problem for teens who are “over-achievers.”
- Withdrawal from some but not all people – adults tend to isolate themselves when depressed but teens often stay in contact with some friends. However, teens may socialize less, pull away from parents and family members or begin hanging out with a different crowd of friends.

Resources to address mental and behavioral health issues include talking with a school counselor or school social worker. Additional resources include:

- Cleveland County Health Department (10 years and older): Nikki Littlejohn 980-484-5100
- National Institute of Mental Health
- Mental Health Association of Cleveland County 704-481-8637
- Partners Behavioral Health Management Access line – 1-888-235-HOPE (4673)
- Phoenix Counseling Center 704-751-3693
- Monarch Behavioral Health 704- 476-4027
- Preferred Choice Healthcare 704-487-4000

Health and Wellness

Continued

Suicide

Suicide is death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die.

A Suicide attempt is defined as a non-fatal, self-directed, and potentially injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.

- More than half (54%) of all violent deaths are suicides, making suicide the second leading cause of death for people ages 10–34, the fourth leading cause of death among adults ages 35–44, and the 11th leading cause of death overall in the United States. However, in North Carolina, suicide is the second leading cause of death among adults ages 19–34 (NCDHHS)
- One person dies by suicide every 11 minutes in the United States.
- Suicide rates vary by race/ethnicity, age, and other factors. “The highest rates are among American Indian/Alaska Native and non-Hispanic White populations. Other Americans with higher-than-average rates of suicide are veterans, people who live in rural areas, and workers in certain industries and occupations like mining and construction (CDC).”
- Young people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual experience higher rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors than their peers who identify as heterosexual (CDC).
- Suicide attempts are much more common than suicide deaths among youth. For every young person who dies by suicide, many more experience suicidal thoughts, make a suicide plan, or attempt suicide.

Why are our youth contemplating suicide? What do we do? Research shows that mental illness, depression, life circumstances, alcohol/drug use, and even family history can be underlying causes of suicide. We may never know the true cause, but we can recognize the signs. Suicide is preventable and everyone has a role to play to save lives and create healthy and strong individuals, families, and communities.

Health and Wellness Continued

Suicide Prevention

Warning Signs/Risks of Suicide:

- Mental illnesses
- Alcohol/substance use
- Hopelessness
- Depression
- Saying things like
- “I want you to have my car if something ever happens to me.”

Warning Signs/Risks of Suicide:

- Saying things like “No one will miss me if I disappear.”
- Separation from family/friends
- History of trauma/abuse
- Physical illness and/or diagnoses
- Job or financial loss
- History of suicide attempts
- Access to lethal means
- Lack of healthcare
- Lack of support

The Cleveland County Health Department Offers QPR Training. Details Below.



The graphic is a vertical poster for QPR training. At the top, it says 'QPR' in large purple letters, with 'Question, Persuade, Refer' written in a teal script below it. To the right is a circular image of hands forming a heart. Below this, it states 'QPR is intended to offer hope through positive action.' and 'Just like CPR, QPR is an emergency response to someone in a crisis and can save lives. QPR is the most widely taught gatekeeper training in the world.' The middle section is titled 'QPR MISSION' and contains two paragraphs about the mission and the signs of crisis. The bottom section is titled 'SIGN-UP FOR OUR QPR GATEKEEPER TRAINING' and encourages reaching out for support. At the very bottom, there are contact details, logos for the QPR Institute, Cleveland County Health Department, and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

QPR
Question, Persuade, Refer

QPR is intended to offer hope through positive action.

Just like CPR, QPR is an emergency response to someone in a crisis and can save lives. QPR is the most widely taught gatekeeper training in the world.

QPR MISSION

The QPR mission is to reduce suicidal behaviors and save lives by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training.

The signs of crisis are all around us. We believe that quality education empowers all people, regardless of their background, to make a positive difference in the life of someone they know.

SIGN-UP FOR OUR QPR GATEKEEPER TRAINING

Remember, your mental health matters. Don't hesitate to reach out and seek the support you deserve. Together, we can stop the stigma, offer hope, and save lives.

When you apply QPR, you plant the seeds of **HOPE**.
And **HOPE** helps to prevent suicide.

Contact for more information

980-484-5205
zakoya.spikes@clevelandcountync.gov

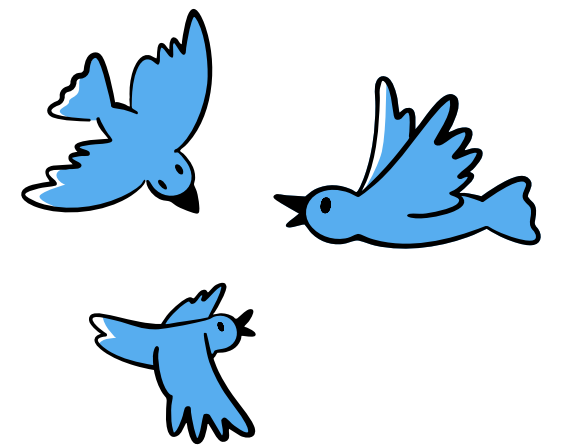
QPR INSTITUTE

Cleveland County HEALTH DEPARTMENT

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE



“The Talk”



As a parent, you have the primary responsibility for helping your child develop healthy knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills related to relationships, sexuality, nutrition, physical activity, and overall well-being. Supporting your child as they grow into a safe, healthy, and responsible adult is an important goal. We understand that talking with your child about sex and relationships—or even thinking about your child becoming sexually active—can feel uncomfortable.

Talking openly with your teen can help them make informed and healthy decisions. Discuss the physical and emotional changes that occur during puberty, your expectations regarding dating and relationships, ways to prevent teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, and the characteristics of healthy relationships.

Start conversations early and continue them often. Be prepared to listen, answer questions honestly, and create an environment where your teen feels comfortable coming to you for guidance.

Your Teen and Puberty

Hormonal changes during adolescence are a normal part of growing up. Most girls begin puberty between the ages of 8 and 13, while most boys begin between the ages of 9 and 14. Every child develops at their own pace, and these changes can happen earlier or later for some youth.

Puberty can be an exciting time as young people transition from childhood to adulthood. It can also be confusing and overwhelming as they experience physical, emotional, and social changes. Support, understanding, and open communication from parents and caregivers can help teens navigate this important stage of development.



“The Talk” Continued

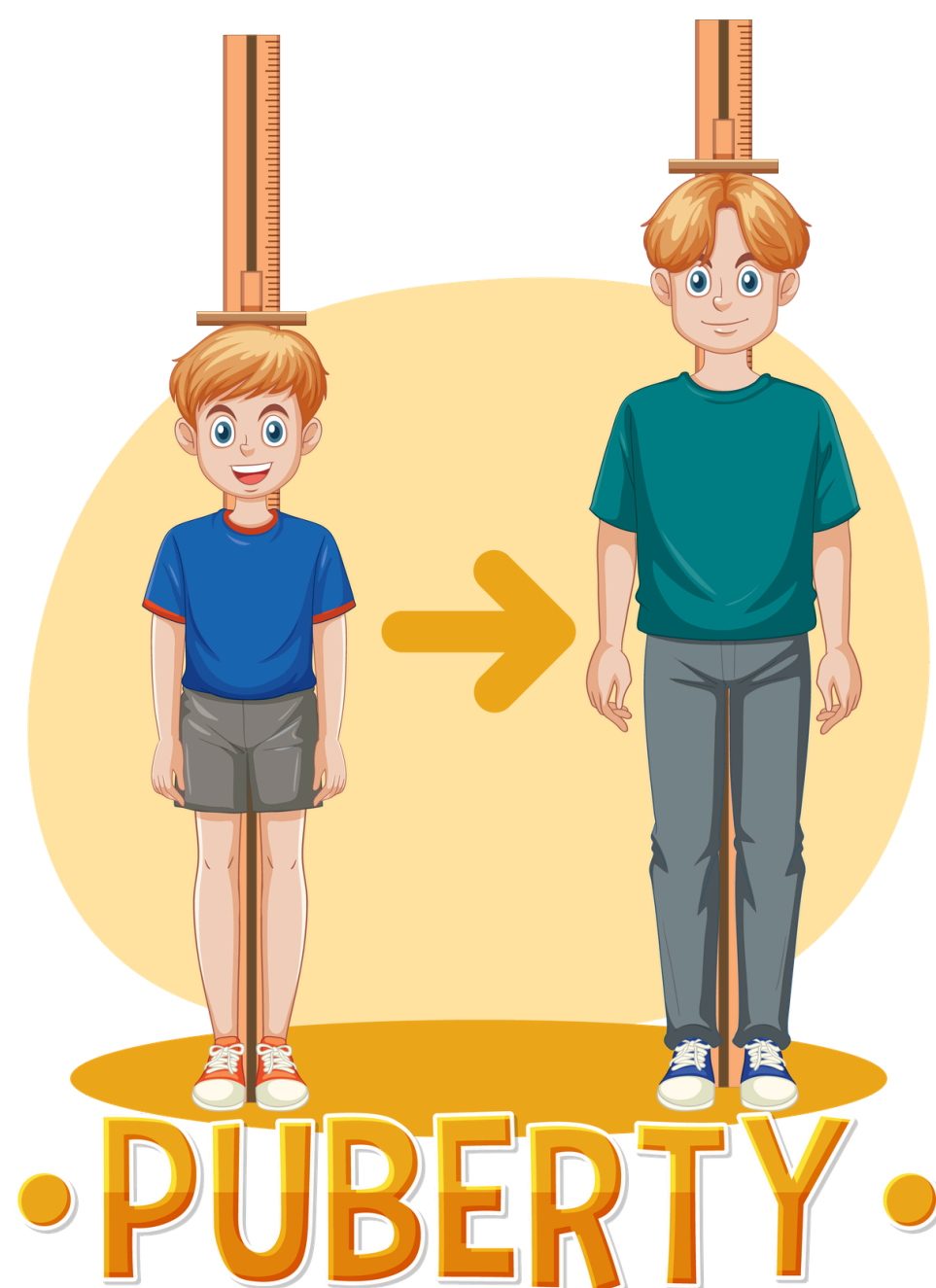
As teens go through puberty, hormones can create intense emotions in both males and females. Below is a list of normal behaviors your child might experience as they change into adulthood:

- Mood swings
- Tiredness
- Sadness
- Irritability
- Anger
- Self-consciousness
- Sexual desires/Arousal

Physical changes may include:

- Growing taller
- Breast development
- Skin changes
- Hair growth
- Body shape changes
- Periods

When talking to your child about puberty, it's important to be reassuring. Puberty brings about so many changes that it's easy for kids to feel insecure and alone.



“The Talk” Continued

Your child’s reproductive health and safety is a topic that you might understandably shy away from. Most parents are not comfortable talking with their child about sex. However, **you are the most important person** for your child to talk to when it comes to this topic. Unfortunately, if you don’t discuss it with them, there is a chance they could receive misguided information from a friend or another source.



Below are some Frequently Asked Questions parents have about talking to their kids about sex.

“At what age should I talk to my child about sex or what age do children need to know about sex?”

It is important to have a series of age-appropriate talks. The way to think about this is that if you have a series of age-appropriate talks, you don’t need to get everything out there all at once. Starting when they’re young, you have a chance to ease into things and make sure your child has the information they need when they need it. Too many parents wait for the “right” time to come along for “the talk” only to find that it never does and then they don’t have the talk at all, or it happens after their child has already become sexually active, which is too late.

For example: In early childhood, the focus can be on learning the correct anatomical names for all their body parts, recognizing that different people have different bodies, and understanding appropriate versus inappropriate touching. As they get older talk about the changes that happen to the body during puberty and then about how babies are formed. Later, you can address safe-sex practices, sexual consent, and how to navigate relationships.

“The Talk” Continued

This process can also make it easier on you as a parent. By not letting the awkwardness build and delaying the conversation, you are opening the lines of communication early and get everyone used to talking about sex and the body which will make the other conversations on more complex subjects much easier.

It feels awkward to talk to my kid about sex. What should I say?

First you want to recognize that the awkwardness, uncertainty, and embarrassment that you may feel in talking about sex are normal feelings. However, do not let that stop you. You may have never had “the talk” from your own parents so you may be unsure how things should go. Let’s be honest for a minute. There is not one “correct” way to teach your kids about their body and sex. If you’re worried that you won’t have the right words or that you won’t be able to describe things very well, talk to a medical professional and research medical articles and books.

Remember everyday life provides lots of opportunities for talking about sexuality and relationships. Here are some common teachable moments to look out for:

- When you, another family member, friend, or neighbor announces they’re pregnant.
- Ads for pads and tampons, birth control, or condoms appear in the media.
- Puberty, dating, love, or sex comes up on a TV show, in a movie, or in a song on the radio.
- When unrealistic portrayals of, or very sexualized, bodies such as photoshopped celebrities or models are in the media.

When any of these things come up, jump in, and start a conversation. Start with an open-ended question like: “What do you think about the fact that, that celebrity (name) is photo-shopped on the cover to look different or more perfect than they may be in real life?” “What would you do if someone you were dating started acting like that character on this TV show?”

Be open and listen to their answers. Fill in gaps in knowledge and correct misinformation when you hear them. If they get embarrassed when you bring any of these topics up, reassure them that it’s OK to be embarrassed about this stuff but they have nothing to be ashamed of. Give them your take on things based on your values. And let them know they can always come to you to talk things through, get advice, find good information, or get access to health care. Thank them for their willingness to have this conversation.

“The Talk” Continued

What else can I do to help my kids stay safe and healthy?

The best way to keep your kids safe and healthy is to stay involved in their lives and to set some boundaries. Here are some good ways to stay involved:

- Ask open-ended questions about their day at school such as “What was the most memorable part of your day?” or “How are you feeling about your new teacher/class/school?”
- Ask about their friends and get to know them and their parents.
- Encourage them to spend more time with kids whose families appear to share similar values.
- Always be aware of which adults are around when your kid is at events and visiting other households.
- Ask them questions about what they’re up to online. Educate yourself about their social media apps.
- Ask questions about activities or events where participants may be older teens or young adults.
- Encourage them in their hobbies and interests. Be present at games, recitals, and such when possible.
- Always be open to their questions. Be honest in answering questions.
- Know where they’re going and who they’ll be with, and don’t allow preteens or teens to spend a lot of time alone without a trustworthy adult present.

As kids grow into preteens and teens, and start to become more independent, setting some reasonable boundaries will make them less likely to engage in risky behavior such as drinking, smoking, having unprotected sex, or having sex before they’re ready.

Establish clear expectations (curfews, dating, rules about drugs/alcohol, etc.) and check in regularly to be sure those expectations are met. Establish a “safe” word so that your child can call you for help if they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation. Make your teen a part of the conversation by listening to them and allowing them to negotiate on some of the expectations. It shows that you respect them and understand that they are growing up and becoming more responsible for themselves. You may feel like the “sex talk” is uncomfortable just as much as your child does but it is important that your child understands the importance of delaying sexual activity.

Resources

For additional resources and services available within our county, please take a look at our Cleveland County Resource Guide, which can be found at:

<https://www.clevelandcountyhdc.com/index.php>

Healthy Relationships

A healthy relationship is when two people develop a connection based on mutual respect, trust, and honesty. Teens should consider themselves to be in a healthy relationship when each person respects sexual boundaries and respects their needs and wants. Teens often think that behaviors such as teasing, and name calling are a normal part of a relationship. However, these kinds of behaviors can become abusive and develop into more serious forms of violence. Teens can be more vulnerable to this kind of violence for many reasons.

Share your values

Talk to your teen about respect, healthy relationships, and what your teen wants out of his/her relationships. Talk with your teen about what you want for him or her.

For example:

“I want you to have a boyfriend/girlfriend who respects you.”

“I want you to have a boyfriend/girlfriend you feel really comfortable being around.”

“I want you to enjoy your relationship with your boyfriend/girlfriend and enjoy fulfilling and healthy relationships with other people who care for you.”

Also make your teen apart of the conversation by asking them what is important to them. Here are some questions to help you start talking about relationships:

What would your ideal relationship be like?

What are you looking for in a boyfriend/girlfriend?

What comes to your mind when you think of real love?

What do you think an abusive relationship would look and feel like?

Do you know anyone who has a healthy relationship? What about an unhealthy relationship? Why do you think their relationship is healthy/unhealthy?

When you share your values and listen to what’s important to your teen, you are helping your teen think about what she or he really wants in a relationship.

Also, when it comes to the topic of dating and healthy relationships, open communication can make a huge difference in your teen’s ability to avoid teen dating violence.

Healthy relationships Continued

What is dating violence?

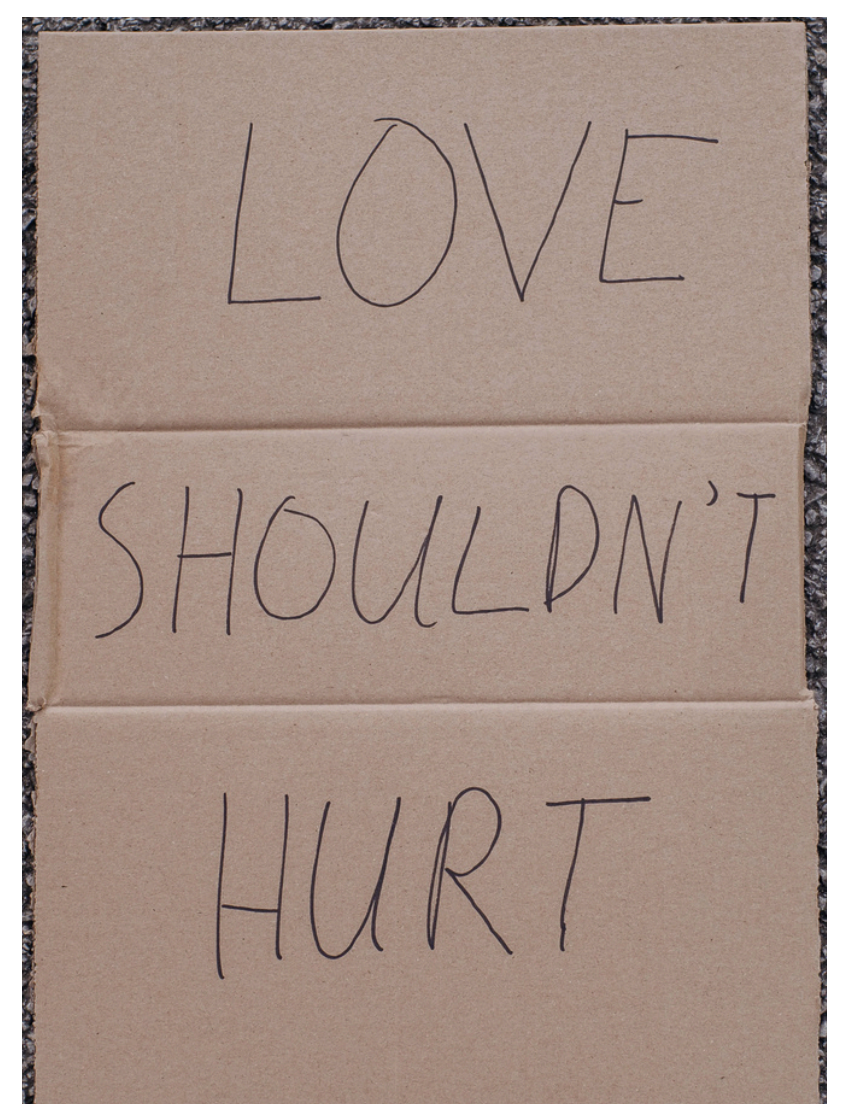
Dating violence is a pattern of physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse that occurs within a dating relationship. It can involve actual acts of abuse or threats of abuse and may occur between current or former dating partners. According to the CDC, about 1 in 12 high school students who dated in the past year experienced physical dating violence. Talking with teens about healthy relationships, respect, boundaries, and warning signs of abuse is an important step in helping prevent dating violence.

Warning signs of dating violence can include:

- Apologizing for behavior or making excuses for a boyfriend/girlfriend
- Losing interest in activities they usually enjoy
- Avoiding family and friends
- Growing isolation
- Name-calling between partners
- Extreme jealousy
- Constant calling or texting
- Demanding social media passwords
- Short-tempered behavior and unexplained injuries.

To help your teen develop strong, healthy, and mutually respectful relationships, it is important to start by talking with your teen about the overall signs of a healthy relationship. Here are some ways you can talk, listen, and support your teen as they navigate relationships.

Hitting is not love.
Mind games are not love.
Put downs are not love.
Stalking is not love.
Jealousy is not love.
Controlling is not love.



Healthy relationships Continued

Conversation Starters

- *How are things going?* A general question to open the conversation is often helpful so your teen does not feel put on the spot.
- *What do you think a healthy dating relationship looks like?* Have examples of couples who have a healthy relationship.
- *Do you think your friends' relationships look the same as what you described, or are they different?*
- *Have you ever experienced or seen behavior that concerns you or that you think is abusive?* Based on the response, you can explore what dating violence or abusive behavior might look like.
- Ask why they think someone would abuse the other in a dating relationship.
- *Why do you think someone would stay in an unhealthy relationship?* Asking this question might open a discussion about how your teen perceives the controlling nature of abusive relationships.
- *What would you do if you or a friend were in an unhealthy dating relationship?* This can give you an opportunity to share resources, safe people to turn to, and an understanding that you know bad things can sometimes happen.

Help your teen to understand that you are always willing to discuss and answer questions about this and other sensitive issues. Approaching any topic in a non-judgmental environment will set the tone for conversations and situations to come. Also, when addressing these topics, take opportunities to open dialogue - for example, on a ride to school, a coffee shop, on a walk, anywhere away from the distractions. Keeping things light and positive will typically result in your teen being more willing to talk. Remember, once you have asked the question, sit back and really listen to your teen's response.

Healthy relationships Continued

Resources

Domestic violence can affect anyone, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, education, income, or religion. If you are concerned that your teenager—or you—may be experiencing an abusive relationship, the following resources are available to provide support, information, and assistance.

Abuse Prevention Council (APC) Crisis Line

If you have questions or would like to speak with someone about domestic or dating violence, trained advocates are available 24 hours a day to provide confidential support.

Phone: **704-481-0043**

Website: **<https://www.abusepreventioncouncil.org/>**

Abuse Prevention Council (APC)

The Abuse Prevention Council provides professional counseling services for survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault. Services also include on-site advocacy at the Cleveland County Courthouse, assistance with filing a 50B Domestic Violence Protective Order, accompaniment to civil and criminal court proceedings, and referrals to legal services, including Legal Aid of North Carolina.

Phone: **704-487-9325**

Cleveland County Sheriff's Office

For emergencies, call 911. For non-emergency assistance, contact the Sheriff's Office.

Phone: **704-484-4888**

Website: **<https://www.sheriffclevelandcounty.com/>**

Shelby Police Department

For emergencies, call 911. For non-emergency assistance, contact the Shelby Police Department.

Phone: **704-484-6845**

Website: **<http://www.cityofshelby.com/departments/police>**



Self-Esteem Matters

Healthy self-esteem is like a child's armor against the challenges of the world. Children who recognize their strengths and weaknesses and feel good about themselves are often better able to handle conflicts and resist negative pressures. They tend to smile more readily, enjoy life, and maintain a realistic yet optimistic outlook.

Self-esteem develops through experiences that help a child feel capable, effective, and accepted. When children learn new things on their own, they develop a sense of pride and confidence in their abilities. As they see positive results from working hard to achieve a goal, they begin to feel more capable and effective. When parents provide encouragement and support, children feel accepted and are more likely to develop a healthy sense of self-worth.

Signs of Low Self-Esteem:

- Speaks negatively of themselves.
- Unwilling to try new activities.
- Gives up easily.
- Overly critical of themselves and others
- Easily disappointed
- See temporary setbacks as permanent.
- Does not interact well with others.
- Does not face challenges.

Source: <http://kidshealth.org/>



Self-Esteem Matters Continued

Tips for parents to help their children develop high self-esteem

Be careful with what you say – Your praise is a way to show that you are proud; however, do it wisely. Be sure to praise your child not only for a job well done but also for their effort. When a child is praised for their effort, they are more likely to succeed because it encourages them to keep trying and to work toward goals.

However, remember that praising your child for something they didn't earn will not sound true to them. For example: Telling them that they played a great game when they know they did not can sound fake to them. Saying something like "I know that was not your best game, but you tried hard, and I am proud of you for not giving up. You will have a better game tomorrow." This will sound more truthful to them and give them confidence.

Be a positive role model - If you're excessively harsh on yourself, pessimistic, or unrealistic about your abilities and limitations, your kids might eventually mirror you. Nurture your own self-esteem and they'll have a great role model.

Be spontaneous and affectionate - Your love will help boost your child's self-esteem. Give hugs and tell kids you're proud of them when you can see them putting effort toward something or trying something at which they previously failed.

Give positive, accurate feedback - Comments like "You always work yourself up into such a frenzy!" will make kids feel like they have no control over their outbursts. A better statement is, "I can see you were very angry with your brother, but it was nice that you were able to talk about it instead of yelling or hitting." When a child hears negative comments, they may feel bad about themselves and act accordingly.

Create a safe, loving home environment - Kids who don't feel safe or are abused at home are at greatest risk for developing poor self-esteem. A child who is exposed to parents who fight and argue repeatedly may feel they have no control over their environment and become helpless or hopeless.

Help kids become involved in constructive experiences - Activities that encourage cooperation rather than competition are especially helpful in fostering self-esteem. For example, mentoring programs in which an older child helps a younger one learn to read can do wonders for both kids. Volunteering and contributing to your local community can have positive effects on self-esteem for everyone involved. Also teaching your child new things and letting them do what they can, even if they make mistakes, will provide an opportunity to develop self-esteem. Make sure your child has opportunities to learn; feel proud about their accomplishments.

Social Media

Today it seems like most young people spend a good bit of their free time on their cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices. It is important for you as a parent to educate yourself on the potential dangers and red flags of social media as well to educate your child.

Sexting

What is sexting? Sexting is the sending or receiving of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive images, messages, or videos by way of a cell phone or another electronic device. Teens often have a misconception that anything they send/share via social media will remain private between the sender and receiver. The truth is that **nothing** shared through text messages or social media platforms are private. Once sent, a message could follow a young person for the rest of their lives.

Examples of sexting include but are not limited to:

- Nude or nearly nude photos
- Videos that show nudity or sex acts
- Text messages that refer or suggest sexual acts.

Common Apps Used by Teens:

- Instagram – A social media app where users can share photos, videos, Stories, and Reels, as well as like, comment on, and message other users.
- Snapchat – A social media and messaging app where users can send photos, videos, and messages that may disappear after being viewed. It also includes Stories, group chats, and location sharing.
- Facebook – A social media platform where users can share photos, videos, articles, events, and personal updates, join groups, and interact with friends, family, and community organizations.
- Facebook Messenger – A messaging app connected to Facebook that allows users to send direct messages, make voice and video calls, and share photos, videos, and files.
- YouTube – A video-sharing platform where users can watch, upload, livestream, and comment on videos covering a wide variety of topics.
- TikTok – A social media platform where users create, share, and watch short-form videos. It is especially popular among teens and young adults, though it is used by people of all ages.

Social Media Continued



Just because your teen may be using one of these apps doesn't mean that misuse is occurring. Be aware of these apps and the potential dangers that each one could possibly bring. Monitor your teen's use of their phone and apps like these.

Social Media Continued

Bullying/Cyberbullying

Bullying is something that commonly happens at school, home, or in the community daily for teens. Bullying is a repeated aggressive behavior where a person or group of people deliberately intimidates, abuses, or persuades an individual with the intention to hurt that person physically, mentally, or emotionally.

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place virtually using cell phones or other electronic devices. This can include being bullied through text messages, websites, or most commonly through social media websites or apps. Even if someone is being bullied by an anonymous person it can usually be traced back to the sender.

Examples of Cyberbullying may include:

- Hateful messages or emails
- Rumors sent by email or posted on social media.
- Embarrassing pictures or videos sent or posted online.
- Hateful or negative comments on pictures/posts on social media

Children who are victims of cyberbullying often have a harder time escaping the bullying because it can happen 24/7 and often is difficult to trace. It's important your child understands that you have the right to check their phone or other electronic devices at any time. You can also check with your service provider about usage controls such as time restrictions, user locators, content filters and techniques to block specific downloaded pages.

If your child is a victim of any form of bullying these are suggested resources:

- Cleveland County Sheriff's Office 704-484-4888

www.sheriffclevelandcounty.com

- Shelby City Police Department 704-484-6845

<http://www.cityofshelby.com/departments/police>

- To report bullying or cyberbullying in Cleveland County Schools go to:

<https://www.clevelandcountyschools.org/resources/student-resources/bully-prevention>– **Bully Prevention**

Social Media Continued

Bullying/Cyberbullying

For more information or to educate yourself as a parent on topics around social media use, cyberbullying or sexting visit:

General Information:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/social-media-advice-hub/>

Connect Safely

<https://www.connectsafely.org/>

National Crime Prevention Council

<https://www.ncpc.org/>

Safe Kids

<https://www.safekids.org/>

Stop Bullying

StopBullying.gov

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

1-800-273-8255 or call/text **988** for help



24/7 CALL, TEXT, CHAT

Substance Misuse

From large cities to small towns, drugs are everywhere and used by people of all ages, races, and economic backgrounds. Parents should educate themselves and talk to their children about the dangers of misusing alcohol, tobacco, prescription medications and illegal drugs.

Are you your child's supplier?

As children become older, their desire to be more independent increases. Along with this new independence comes additional pressure to fit in or to belong to a group. This may lead to experiments in risky behaviors such as using alcohol, tobacco, prescription medications and/or illegal drugs. Young people sometimes feel the need to experiment if they see a family member, friend or another student at school choosing these behaviors.

Research shows that youth whose parents talk to them about the dangers of substance misuse are less likely to experiment with these substances. Yet one in three students in Cleveland County report that their parents NEVER or SELDOM talk about the problems associated with using alcohol, tobacco, prescription medications or illegal drugs.

Signs of Substance Misuse

If you think that your child may be misusing any of these substances, it is important to seek intervention early. These are some of the warning signs of substance misuse:

- Changes in overall attitude or personality with no identifiable cause
- Drop in grades, skipping school, or being habitually late for school.
- Changes in habits at home – loss of interest in family members or family activities
- An unexplained need for money
- The smell of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs on their breath, body, or clothes
- Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual; a blank stare
- Slow or staggering walk; poor coordination
- An inability to sleep or unusual laziness.

Substance Misuse Continued

What can you do to prevent drug misuse?

There are several opportunities to prevent substance misuse among youth, especially in the home

- Educate your child on the dangers of misusing alcohol, tobacco, prescription medications and illegal drugs. Emphasize both the short-term and long-term effects of misuse.
- Keep your prescription medications locked in a safe place.
- Monitor the number of pills in prescription medication containers and dispose of any unused or out-of-date medications properly.
- Keep any alcohol in a locked cabinet.
- Know your child's friends and the friends' family. Know where they are going, who will be going and when they will return home.
- Be sure to create a “safe” word for your child so that they can notify you if they need to be picked up from an event where they may feel uncomfortable.
- Develop rules for your child to follow. Make sure that they know what is expected of them. Most important – enforce the rules and invoke consequences if the rules are broken!

The best thing you can do is to educate yourself and your child about the physical, emotional, and legal consequences of substance misuse. Encourage your child to talk with you about these issues. If you are uncomfortable with starting a conversation on these topics, ask for help from a school counselor, minister, or trusted family member. You as a parent have the right to search your child's property (room, cell phone, social media accounts, etc.) at any time if you suspect suspicious behavior.

Substance Misuse Continued

Vaping

Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol (often called vapor) produced by an e-cigarette or other electronic vaping device. The aerosol is not just water vapor, it can contain nicotine, harmful chemicals, and tiny particles that may damage the lungs and heart.

According to the 2022 North Carolina Youth Tobacco Survey, 23.8% of North Carolina high school students reported using electronic vapor products in the past 30 days. While youth vaping has declined in recent years, e-cigarettes remain the most commonly used tobacco product among adolescents.

Many vaping products contain nicotine, which is highly addictive. Nicotine exposure during adolescence can interfere with brain development, affecting attention, learning, memory, and mood, and can increase the risk of lifelong addiction.

Are there early education/intervention programs available in the county?

SOAR (Students Options and Redirection) is a student diversion program within the Health Education unit of the Cleveland County Health Department. This program is for youth of Cleveland County who have violated the Cleveland County Schools substance abuse policies. Such violations carry an automatic ten-day suspension at the discretion of school administrators which often impact the student's academic performance. If the student and parents/guardians agree to participate in and complete the four-session program, the suspension may be reduced to only five days. Upon completion of the program and payment of fees, a notice of completion is forwarded to the referring school administrator for action. There is a sliding fee scale for fees charged in this program. The program consists of four sessions spread over a period of four to six weeks. The sessions are spaced out to give the participant and the parents/guardians ample opportunity to consider and discuss the information provided to them during program delivery. Each student participant completes the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory to assess the potential for chemical dependency and to assist the health educator in selecting appropriate educational materials for the student.

For more information about this program, please contact:

DeShay Oliver: 980-484-5199

Substance Misuse Continued

Additional resources

Drug Free Cleveland County for community programs and events

Yanet Cisneros: 980-484-5199

Yanet.Cisneros@clevelandcountync.gov

Web Sites: <https://www.talkitoutnc.org/>
<https://truthinitiative.org>

Resources for substance abuse treatment:

Partners Behavioral Health Management	1-888-235-4673
Phoenix Counseling Center	704-751-3693
Preferred Choice HealthCare	704-487-4000

Cleveland County Health
Department/Substance Abuse
Services: Age 10 and older
980-484-5100

Resources for disposal of unused and out-of-date medications:

Cleveland County has multiple permanent locations for Take-Back boxes across the county. These boxes are maintained by the Cleveland County Sheriff’s Office and are placed in safe locations.



Emerging Areas of Concern:

Gambling

Information for this section is sourced from the North Carolina Problem Gambling Program (NCPGP) which provides and supports effective problem gambling prevention, education, outreach, and treatment in North Carolina. The purpose of the program is to provide treatment services, training, and technical support in-person and on-line for prevention and provide education and outreach to promote awareness through media, partnerships, and integration.

To contact this program or to obtain additional resources about gambling, visit www.morethanagamenc.com or call 1-877-718-5543.

What is gambling? Gambling is risking money or something of material value on an activity or event with an uncertain outcome in hope of winning additional money or something of material value.

Gambling has been around civilizations for thousands of years. Today gambling is a \$100 billion commercial enterprise with legalized gambling available in every state except Utah and Hawaii. The National Council on Problem Gambling reports that 1% of US adults are estimated to be pathological gamblers in any given year with another 2-3% estimated to be problem gamblers. Higher prevalence rates are found in people in their teens and 20s as well as ethnic minorities, active-duty military, veterans and older adults and individuals diagnosed with a mental health or substance use disorder.

Research shows that children are engaging in gambling activities earlier than they are with drug or alcohol use. North Carolina began providing prevention and treatment services relating to the area of problem gambling as a legislative mandate in 2005 when the North Carolina Education Lottery was created. The North Carolina Problem Gambling program is dedicated to building awareness for what has been called the “hidden addiction”.

Emerging Areas of Concern:

What is problem gambling? Problem gambling is any gambling behavior that disrupts a person's life. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family or even suicide. Warning signs of a problem gambler include:

- Being preoccupied with gambling
- Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money to get the same thrill.
- Trying to control, cut back, or stop gambling without success.
- Feeling restless or irritable when trying to cut down on gambling.
- Gambling to escape problems.
- Attempting to relieve feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, or depression.
- Trying to get back lost money by gambling more (chasing losses)
- Lying to hide the extent of the gambling.
- Jeopardizing or losing relationships, jobs, school, or work opportunities
- Resorting to theft or fraud to get gambling money.
- Asking others for a bail-out to financial trouble because money has been gambled away.

Research shows that teens and college-age adults are more impulsive and are at a higher risk for developing gambling problems than adults. According to a Harvard University study, 3.9% of adolescents have a pathological gambling problem and another 9.5% experience problem gambling behaviors. Adolescent minorities' gambling problems are two to three times higher than white adolescents. Students with gambling problems are more likely to use tobacco, drink heavily or binge drink, smoke marijuana or use other illegal drugs, drive under the influence, and have a low grade-point average. Children who are introduced to gambling by the age of 12 are four times more likely to become problem gamblers.

Emerging Areas of Concern:

Gambling

Adolescent warning signs of problem gambling may be different than those experienced by adults:

- Unexplained absences from school or classes
- Sudden drop in grades or failure to complete assignments on time
- Change of personality or behavior
- Exaggerated display of money or other material possessions
- Daily or weekly card game
- Bragging about winning at gambling
- Intense interest in gambling conversations
- Unusual interest in newspaper, magazines, periodicals, or sports scores
- Unaccountable explanation for new items of value in possession
- Borrowing or stealing money
- Missing possessions throughout the house
- Credit cards taken out in family members' names.
- Unauthorized debit card use
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Uncharacteristically forgetting appointments or dates
- Use of gambling language in conversations

NCPGP supports implementation of an evidence-based program called *Stacked Deck* for students in middle schools, high schools, and community-based programs. This curriculum offers five to six sessions of 35-45 minutes each that are aimed at changing gambling-related attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and practices. The *Stacked Deck* curriculum is heavily interactive and includes “family pages” to engage family members in the program. Specific outcomes for this program include attitudes toward gambling becoming more negative, participants becoming more knowledgeable about gambling, participants becoming more resistant to false gambling beliefs, improving decision-making and problem-solving skills, and decreasing gambling behaviors.

Emerging Areas of Concern:

Gambling

The Cleveland County Health Department's health education unit is currently training staff members to deliver the *Stacked Deck* curriculum in schools and community programs. For information on scheduling delivery of this curriculum, please contact the Health Education unit at the Cleveland County Health Department.

NCPGP offers an excellent series of fact sheets on problem gambling on their web site. These fact sheets provide specific information for teens and college-age students, older adults, active-duty military, veterans, and cultural/socioeconomic factors related to problem gambling. For more information on problem gambling, free screening and treatment options, training for clinicians and youth prevention programs and grant opportunities, please visit www.morethanagamenc.com.

Emerging Areas of Concern:

Gang Participation

A gang is a group of 3 or more members who share and identify with a common name or symbol, see themselves as a gang, others view them as a gang and are engaged in criminal activity. Young people of all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds participate in gangs.

Source: <https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/about/faq#faq-1-what-is-a-gang>

According to Matt Melvin, Crime Prevention Officer for the Shelby Police Department, there are people in our community who claim to be gang members who may influence your children and lead them down the wrong path. The officer also stated that the peer pressure from this very small group of teens, in some cases only one or two individuals, may have a big influence on a teen's decisions. It is important for parents to keep their teens involved in something. Teens are looking to belong and be accepted. Don't let them get bored or they may find unhealthy ways to occupy their time.

Why do young people join gangs?

Teens become involved with gangs for many different reasons. Some of these reasons include:

- Being pressured by other gang members to join
- Feeling the gang can offer them safety and protection.
- Feeling that it will provide them with an opportunity to earn status and money.

Signs Your Child May Be Involved in a Gang

- Shows an unusual interest in one or two specific clothing colors, symbols, or logos.
- Uses unusual hand signs or gestures to communicate with friends.
- Shows an unusual interest in gang-influenced music, videos, movies, websites, or social media.
- Has unexplained cash or expensive items, such as clothing, shoes, or jewelry.
- Exhibits significant changes in behavior, such as withdrawing from family, staying out late without explanation, repeatedly breaking rules, or using gang-related slang.

Emerging Areas of Concern:

Gang Participation Resources

Cleveland County Juvenile Justice

704-484-4842

Cleveland County Sheriff's Office

704-484-4888

<https://www.sheriffclevelandcounty.com/>

National Gang Center

<http://www.nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/parents-guide-to-gangs>

Shelby City Police Department

704-484-6845

<https://www.cityofshelby.com/page/police>

Emerging Areas of Concern:

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a growing concern across the United States, North Carolina, and even Cleveland County. It is the exploitation of individuals through force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of labor or commercial sex. Traffickers use these tactics to exploit vulnerable individuals for financial gain. Human trafficking is often described as a modern form of slavery, and both federal and state laws prohibit these crimes.

Many victims of human trafficking, particularly women and children, are exploited for commercial sex or pornography. Trafficking also occurs in a variety of labor settings, including domestic work, small businesses, factories, and agriculture. Victims can be of any age, race, gender, or socioeconomic background. What many victims have in common is a vulnerability that traffickers exploit, such as poverty, a history of abuse, homelessness, limited social support, or a desire for acceptance and belonging.

Traffickers use force, fraud, and coercion to recruit and control victims. Force involves the use or threat of physical violence, restraint, or other forms of physical harm. Violence is often used to intimidate victims and break down their resistance.

Fraud involves false promises about employment, wages, education, living conditions, or other opportunities. Victims may be recruited with promises of well-paying jobs, modeling opportunities, or careers in the entertainment industry.

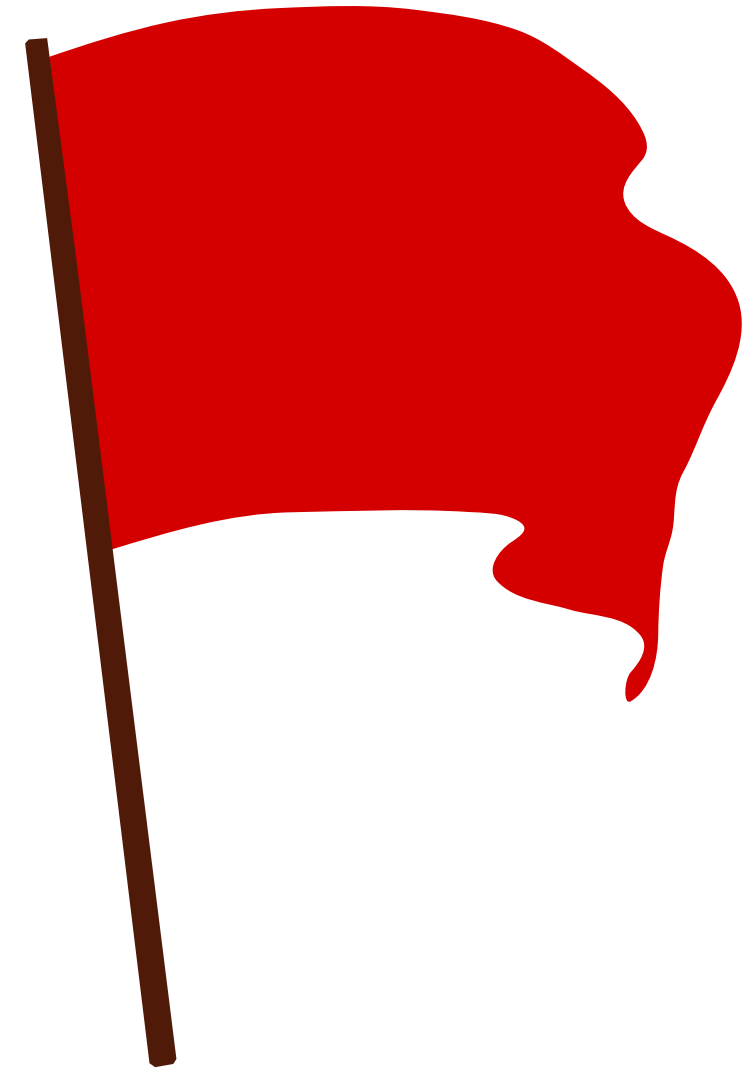
Coercion includes threats of serious harm, physical restraint, psychological manipulation, intimidation, or threats directed toward the victim or their family members. Victims may also experience debt bondage, in which traffickers force them to work to repay a real or alleged debt without clearly defining the amount owed or the length of service required.

Emerging Areas of Concern:

Human Trafficking

Some “red flags” helpful in recognizing potential victims of trafficking include:

- History of sexual or physical abuse
- Evidence of domestic violence or sexual assault
- Older boyfriend or partners
- Substance misuse
- Foster care
- History of running away
- Reluctance to work with law enforcement.
- Specific tattoos (gang symbols, branding, etc.)
- New possessions
- Any sudden changes in behavior or appearance
- Gang-related activities, appearance, or friends
- Individual is not free to leave or to come and go.
- Individual is unpaid, paid very little or paid only through tips.
- Individual works excessively long and/or unusual hours
- Individual is not allowed breaks or suffers unusual restrictions at work.
- Individual owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off.
- Individual was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and the condition of the work performed.
- High security measures at work and/or living conditions.
- Individual has few or no personal possessions.
- Individual is not in control of personal identification or money.
- Individual is not allowed to speak for him/herself.
- Individual lives on site with their employer



Emerging Areas of Concern:

Human Trafficking

Often the question raised is “Why don’t they just leave?” but there are factors affecting the mindset of the victims of trafficking:

- Use of threats and violence
- May be under surveillance.
- Fear/distrust of healthcare providers, law enforcement, government agencies
- Unaware that what is being done to them is a crime.
- Isolated and kept in states of exhaustion and illness.
- Shame, self-blaming, and feeling responsible for the situation or an alleged debt.
- Substance use disorder.
- Moved frequently to deter becoming familiar with people or places.
- Unfamiliar culture or limited English proficiency.
- Legal status of the victim

Resources are available to address human trafficking. To get help, report a tip, find services, and learn more about options for victims of trafficking, contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline. This hotline aids victims in crisis through safety planning, emotional support, and connections to local resources. Services are free, confidential, and available 24/7.

CALL	1-888-373-7888
TEXT	HELP to BEFREE (233733)
EMAIL	help@humantraffickinghotline.org
VISIT	www.humantraffickinghotline.org

Emerging Areas of Concern:

Human Trafficking

US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office on Trafficking in Persons: www.acf.hhs.gov/otip

The North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission, housed in and staffed by the North Carolina Judicial Branch, is the legislatively mandated leader of anti-human trafficking efforts in North Carolina. For more information go to www.nccourts.gov/commissions/human-trafficking-commission

The North Carolina Coalition Against Human Trafficking is a coalition of committed members collaborating in knowledge and practice to provide leadership and support across the state to eradicate human trafficking in North Carolina. Contact through email at nccaht@gmail.com or facebook.com/nccaht.

The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation is assigned jurisdiction for human trafficking. Search NCSBI.gov for information about investigations into human trafficking violations.

Local resources include law enforcement agencies in the county as well as the Department of Social Services.



200 South Post Rd. Shelby, NC 28152
(980) 484-5100