

# COMMUNITY REPORT 2020





## VISION

Every kid has a meaningful network of connections and every adult knows the risks of early drug use and their role to delay, decrease, and defeat youth substance use and addiction.



## MISSION

We meet kids and families where they are and help them find the meaningful connections necessary to reduce youth alcohol and drug use.

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## Who We Are

We're a coalition of caring parents, organizations, and youth dedicated to reducing youth substance use in the community by improving kids' social capital.

LevelUp Fargo was formed in 2015 and is a part of the National Drug-Free Communities effort to combat youth substance use. We're proudly hosted by Dakota Medical Foundation and Impact Foundation, and are funded in part through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## Welcome

LevelUp Fargo published its first Community Report on youth substance use in the fall of 2018. The report was a first of its kind in our community and presented data from our first-ever assessment conducted among middle and high school students in Fargo. The survey measured social capital or connectedness within the areas of peer, family, schools and community, and risk behaviors.

In December 2019, we administered the Student Life Success Survey to more than 5,000 students in 6th-12th grades in the Fargo Public, John Paul II Catholic, and Oak Grove Lutheran schools. The survey's goals were to measure social capital, uncover the prevalence and trends of risk behaviors, and monitor progress in reducing youth substance use since the last survey in 2017.

Through our most recent survey, we found Fargo youth are increasingly stressed and often turning to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. These difficulties seem to be having a negative impact on the mental health, loneliness, and feelings about one's life and future of youth in our community. What's more alarming is that a relatively high proportion of youth would not talk to someone if they were struggling and report that they do not have a trusted adult outside of their family to turn to.

What remained consistent in our findings from 2017 to 2019 is that the greater levels of social capital or connectedness young people have, the less likely they are to engage in risk behaviors.

Our survey findings signal a need for increased substance use awareness and education, and to ensure that young people have a solid network of connections and support.

LevelUp Fargo would like to see this Community Report in the hands of every adult and young person in our community. This report helps us better understand our youth, the struggles they face, and the role we can play in helping them to succeed to their fullest potential. It should serve as a "call to action" to join our movement to reduce youth substance use in the community by improving kids' social capital.



## Mental Health

One can see that concerns about mental health among Fargo youth and their social lives are issues of high concern.

Our survey indicated more than 1 of every 10 middle school and roughly 1 of every 4 high school students stated they had experienced extreme sadness or hopelessness within the past year of the survey.

What's more alarming is that nearly 1 of every 10 middle school and about 1 of every 5 high school students said they had seriously thought about, planned, or even attempted suicide in 2019.

As these difficult feelings seem to escalate, the number of substances used increased and their connectedness decreased. This tells us that when teenagers are struggling mentally, they are turning to drugs or alcohol to help them manage difficult feelings.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### Adults

**Talk to kids about mental health early and often.**

Mental health issues are common among young teens and adults. When left untreated, mental illnesses can lead to substance abuse and an increased risk of suicide.

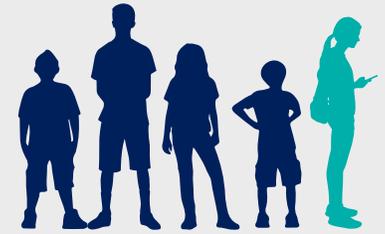
One of the best things you can do for a child's mental well-being is to talk about it. You play a critical role in helping young people understand they are not alone and getting them the help they may need. Your care, guidance, and support can positively impact their overall health and outlook on life.

#### Adolescents

**Ask an adult for help if you or a friend are struggling.**

Being a teenager is hard. You're under stress to be liked, do well in school, and make decisions about the future. Feeling overwhelmingly sad, hopeless, or worthless could be signs of a mental health issue.

Speak up for yourself or a friend. Asking for help is a sign of courage and strength, and a trusted adult can help you figure out what's next. Mental health services are available and the earlier they're accessed the better. You are not alone.



**ABOUT 1 OF EVERY 5** Fargo teens in grades 9-12 **thought** about, **planned**, or **attempted suicide** in 2019

### Know the signs

*Below are common signs of mental health issues in adolescents*



#### Sleep Changes

Sleeping more than usual or not getting enough sleep



#### Mood Swings

Shift in personality including excessive anger or aggressiveness



#### Academic Decline

Difficulty concentrating, avoiding or missing classes



#### Loss of interest

Avoiding social interactions or abandoning favorite activities

# Connectedness

Involvement in extracurricular activities and community programs can increase the number of positive connections youth have. That's why it's a concern that nearly 1 of every 5 Fargo 6th-12th graders report that they don't participate in an activity or group at or outside of school.

It's also unsettling to know that roughly 1 of every 5 Fargo 6th-12th graders say they would not talk to someone or were unsure of who to turn to if they had a problem or concern.

Feeling connected at school seems to be of high concern for Fargo adolescents and appears to directly link to substance use and mental health. More than 1 of every 5 Fargo youth disagreed with the statement "I feel like I belong at my school." Those same students also reported substance use, mental health concerns, and/or fewer connections.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Adults

**Be a link in a child's chain of support.**

All kids need a network of caring adults they can turn to beyond their parents and guardians. When kids feel more connected they tend to have less emotional distress and are less likely to use drugs or alcohol.

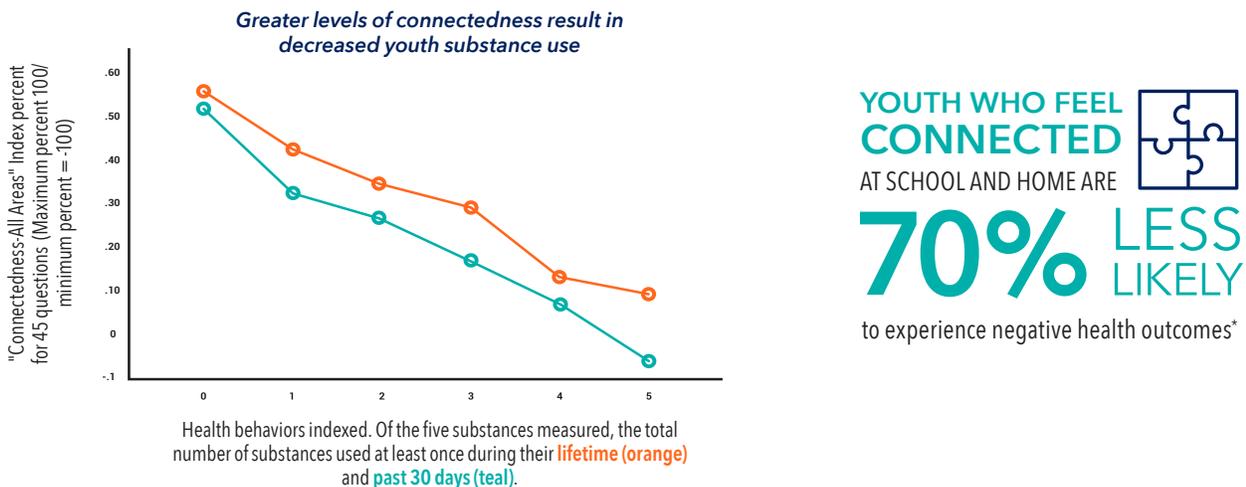
Whether you're a parent, teacher, coach or other caring community member, you can change the path of a young person's life by being present and a safe place for them to go. Your mentorship goes a long way in protecting and helping a child grow into a well-adjusted, considerate, and caring adult.

### Adolescents

**Get involved and encourage friends to do the same.**

Positive relationships and connections have a significant impact on health and well-being. Involvement in community activities and programs offer an opportunity to connect with positive role models, community leaders, and friends.

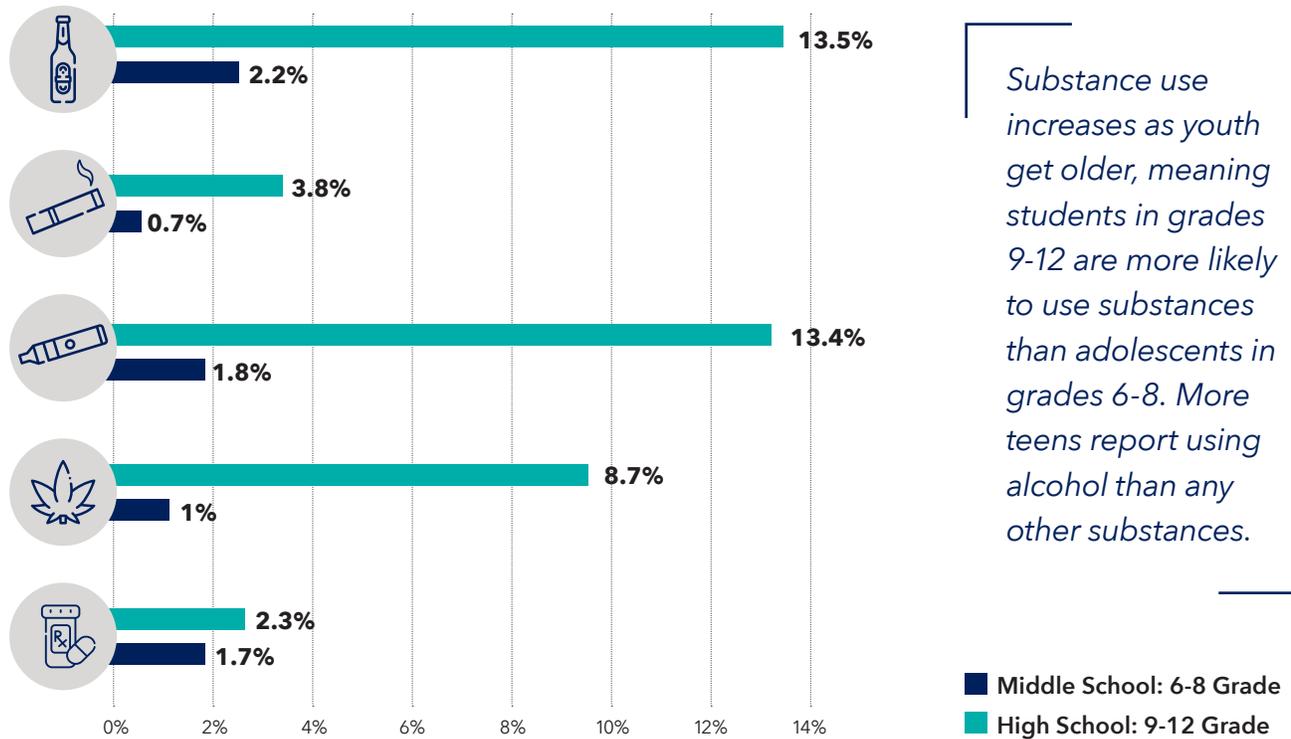
Grab a friend and join a program or activity together that aligns with your interests. You will develop new skills, engage in new experiences, and establish a sense of belonging and purpose.



\*Sources: 2019 Student Life Success Survey and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# Substance Use

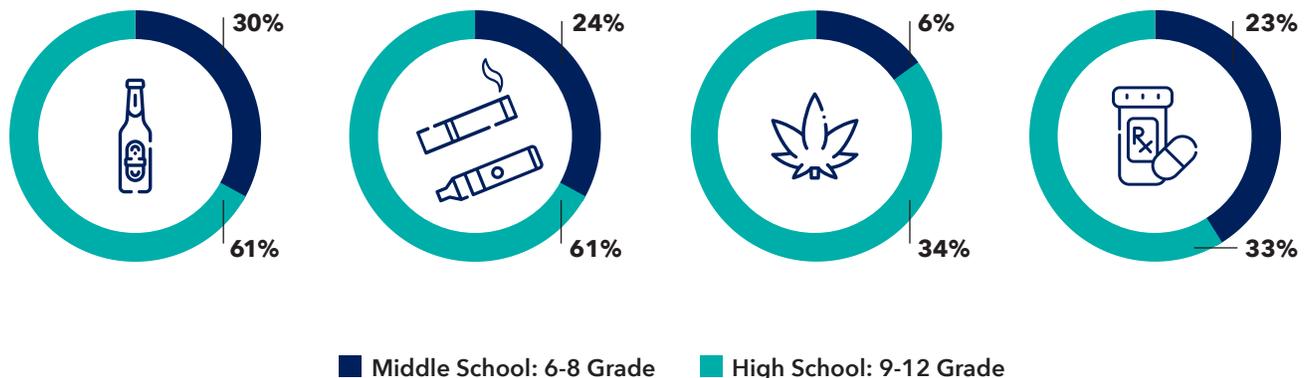
## PAST 30-DAY USE



*Substance use increases as youth get older, meaning students in grades 9-12 are more likely to use substances than adolescents in grades 6-8. More teens report using alcohol than any other substances.*

## EASE OF ACCESS TO SUBSTANCES

Ease of access to substances seems to have a significant relationship with substance use among youth. Middle school age youth tend to use substances they have easy access to in their homes, whereas high school age youth most often access substances through friends and peers.



## Alcohol

Alcohol remains the primary drug of choice among Fargo youth and binge drinking is a concern.

According to our survey, about 1 of every 10 Fargo 6th-12th graders indicated they had drunk alcohol in the 30-days prior to the survey. What's of bigger concern is that those same students who reported drinking, roughly 1 of every 4 middle school and nearly 1 of every 2 high school students also reported binge drinking during the prior month.

This indicates that while the number of youth currently drinking may be decreasing, those who are drinking are drinking excessively (5 or more drinks in a row).

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### Adults

**Deliver the message that underage drinking is dangerous.**

Adolescents aren't prepared to deal with the risks of alcohol on their own. Alcohol short-circuits a young person's brain and puts them at a higher risk for depression and anxiety. It also increases their chance of developing an addiction later in life.

Start the conversation with kids about alcohol early on. Talk about the impact of alcohol on their developing brain and the importance of delaying their first drink. Your guidance will help them make smarter, healthier decisions for themselves and their futures.

#### Adolescents

**Use your voice to protect you and your friends.**

Underage drinking is a bigger deal than you might think. Adolescents who drink have trouble knowing when to stop and can get drunk twice as fast as adults. It can also lead to life-changing consequences including car crashes, alcohol poisoning, and addiction.

Delay your first drink until you're at least of legal drinking age to protect your brain and your future. Then, talk to friends about not drinking alcohol and remind them that not everyone does it. You have the power to protect yourself and your friends.

**DRINKING BEFORE  
AGE 15, RESULTS IN**

**4X THE  
RISK**

**OF ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE**

↳ **LATER IN LIFE\***

**1/2**

**OF 9-12 GRADERS**

who drank alcohol in the  
30-days prior to survey,

**BINGE DRANK**



(5+ drinks in a row.)

## Tobacco/E-Cigarettes

E-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among youth in Fargo. Recent findings from our Student Life Success survey show disturbing rates of e-cigarette use among both middle and high school students.

About 1 of every 10 middle school and almost 1 of every 3 high school students reported they've used e-cigarettes in their lifetime. More than 1 of every 20 middle school and nearly 3 of every 20 high school students used e-cigarettes in the 30-days prior to the survey.

The primary reasons why youth have said to have used e-cigarettes are peer or family member use, availability of enticing flavors, and the perception that they are less harmful than other forms of tobacco products like cigarettes.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### Adults

**Set the facts straight about tobacco products.**

Kids don't realize that nicotine is harmful no matter how it's delivered. Nicotine impacts parts of the adolescent brain that controls attention, learning, mood and impulse control. It also increases the risk for future addiction to other drugs.

Maintain an open dialogue with youth to dispel the myths. You also play an important role by keeping these products out of kids' hands. Your willingness to speak with young people about tobacco products, and being tobacco-free yourself, have the power to prevent adolescents from using.

#### Adolescents

**Take an active stance not to use tobacco/e-cigarettes.**

Despite what you may have heard, e-cigarettes are not less harmful than smoking regular cigarettes. The vapor users inhale contain harmful compounds including heavy metals and other cancer-causing chemicals.

The best prevention method is to never start. Your body and future-self will thank you for it.

### Know What To Look For



60% of Fargo 9th-12th graders say it would be easy for them to access tobacco or e-cigarettes

# Marijuana

Marijuana use appears to be trending slightly upward among Fargo 6th-12th graders. Nearly 1 of every 30 middle school and nearly 1 of every 5 high school students have used marijuana in their lifetime.

If the statement “perception is reality” is true, then there is a great need to change perceptions of Fargo youth. Compared to smoking tobacco/e-cigarettes, more students said they don’t feel their friends would view their use of marijuana as wrong or harmful.

Evidence from law enforcement shows that most of the younger users no longer smoke marijuana joints but prefer to adapt their e-cigarette devices to inhale marijuana.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Adults

**Empower young people to say no.**

Adolescents, and even some adults, believe that marijuana is safer than alcohol or other drugs. However, marijuana significantly impacts an adolescent’s brain development and increases their risk of mental illness.

Kids are faced with tough decisions every day. That’s why it’s important to help them learn the risks of marijuana and provide them with the tools they need to resist temptation. Your messages can protect young people’s minds and bodies from the harm caused by marijuana and other drugs.

### Adolescents

**Make a pact to say no.**

Marijuana impairs judgment and coordination, as well as academic and athletic performance. It can also worsen mental health issues including anxiety and depression.

Young people tend to follow a strong leader among them, and sometimes all it takes is one person to say no to keep the group away from marijuana and other drugs. Your promise to yourself and your friends to live above the influence can start a revolution of change for your generation and beyond.



2/5 of Fargo 9th-12th graders view marijuana use as harmless



1/3 of Fargo 9th-12th graders say their friends wouldn’t view their use of marijuana as wrong

## Know What To Look For

Marijuana can come in edible form, meaning it can be eaten. Edibles can often be youth-appelling foods like **candies, gummies, brownies, and cookies.**



## Prescription Medications

While prescription drug abuse continues to rise nationally across the U.S., it does not appear to be increasing among Fargo middle and high school youth.

According to our recent survey, about 1 of every 20 middle schoolers and almost 1 of every 10 high schoolers admitted to abusing at least one prescription drug in their lifetime.

When it comes to ease of access, nearly 3 of every 10 Fargo youth indicated it would be "easy" to obtain a prescription drug.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### Adults

**Teach kids about the dangers of medicines early on.**

Prescription drugs are the most commonly abused substances by adolescents after alcohol and e-cigarettes. Often times, teens begin experimenting with drugs found in the bathroom medicine cabinet.

Young individuals need to know that legally prescribed medicines have just as much cause for concern as illegal drugs. Talk to kids about the dangers and take the steps necessary to keep prescriptions out of the wrong hands. Your education and support will guide youth on a path to healthier futures.

#### Adolescents

**Take responsibility for learning how to take medications safely.**

Just because they're prescribed by a doctor, doesn't make prescription drugs safe. Prescriptions are every bit as dangerous and addictive as street drugs.

Take medications exactly as prescribed. It's also important to never take someone else's prescription or share yours with a friend. Your actions affect your health, safety, and future.



*2/3 of U.S. teens who report prescription drug abuse get them from friends or family\**

### 5 MOST POPULAR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ABUSED BY YOUTH\*

1. **OXYCONTIN**  
Potent painkiller
2. **VICODIN**  
Narcotic used to treat pain
3. **XANAX**  
Primarily used to treat anxiety
4. **VALIUM**  
Treats anxiety and seizures
5. **ADDERALL**  
Treats ADHD and narcolepsy

## What's ahead for our community?

We know that the greater levels of connectedness young people have, the less likely they are to engage in risk behaviors. Positive change starts when kids have trusting, healthy, and supportive relationships. That's why it's our responsibility as a community to empower kids to seek out resources and get involved in community programs and extracurricular activities.

LevelUp is committed to working with community partners to increase connection opportunities for kids, raise awareness about youth substance abuse, and build a network of support for our future leaders to reach their full potential.

### JOIN OUR MOVEMENT

#### Become an ambassador

LevelUp Ambassadors are part of a network of leaders, inspiring others to learn about and support our mission of reducing youth alcohol and drug use. Being an ambassador is a rewarding experience that allows you to share your passion for helping youth thrive.



#### INVITE

Invite your friends, family, and colleagues to join the LevelUp Fargo movement.



#### SHARE

Share our mission through community presentations at your church, school, business, service club and/or association.



#### ENGAGE

Engage your social media network by sharing information that raises awareness for youth substance use.



#### SUPPORT

Support us by giving your time and talent at local community events and for various projects.

“  
*It only takes  
one person  
to change the  
path of an  
individual's life.*

**Randi Berglund**  
Substance Abuse  
Representative

## Coalition Members

Mary Locken  
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*Cultural Diversity Center*

Randi Streff  
*Dakota Family Services*

Robyn Litke Sall  
*Fargo Cass Public Health*

Grace Solberg  
*Fargo Davies Student*

Maggie Krueger  
*Fargo Davies Student*

Sgt. Cristie Jacobsen  
*Fargo Police Department*

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Jessica Siders  
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Dr. Rupak Gandhi  
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*Hope Lutheran Church*

Tanya RedRoad  
*ND Federation of Families for  
Children's Mental Health*

Dawn Peters  
*North Dakota Juvenile Court*

Nicole Leitner  
*North Dakota Juvenile Court*

Sen. Kathy Hogan  
*North Dakota Legislative Branch*

Mackenzie Brimm  
*Park Co. Realtors*

Anna Frissell  
*Red River Children's  
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*Working together to delay, decrease, and defeat youth substance use and addiction.*

