

The Western CT Coalition Drug Free Schools Committee consists of social workers, counselors and school-based health staff in the 43 towns of Western CT. The committee assesses school-based needs related to substance use and mental health and provides education and awareness through publications and programs for students, families, and school staff. To learn more, visit [our website](#).



THE EDUCATOR

Special Edition for School Staff

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Addressing Teen Vaping in Schools

While most youth in Western CT do not vape*, some are using nicotine and THC to cope with mental health issues. Advertising can make e-cigarettes look cool and safe. The legalization of cannabis can lead people to believe its not harmful for them to use THC. As school staff and administrators, you on the frontlines of information for teens about vaping. In this special edition of The Educator we hope to increase your knowledge about the effects of nicotine and cannabis on the teen brain, provide tips for having deeper conversations with youth and their families, and provide additional resources to explore.

Vaping devices enable youth to ingest large amounts of nicotine and high concentrations of cannabis/THC. Here are some facts about each of these substances, and the consequences of youth use:



Nicotine:

Nicotine levels vary in e-cigarettes. Introduced by Juul in 2015, today's popular vapes (predominantly disposable) contain nicotine salts which allow higher concentrations of nicotine to be delivered with little irritation. **The EBCREATE BC5000 (previously marketed as Elf Bar and pictured above) contains 5,000 puffs of 50mg strength nicotine. A pack of combustible cigarettes contains 22-36 mg.**

Cannabis:

An e-cigarette can be used to vape cannabis in many forms. Concentrates of cannabis like wax (called DAB) or oil can contain 50-90% THC, the drug's main mind-altering chemical. Dried cannabis contains approximately 20%. **These high levels of THC can cause heightened side effects** like passing out, extreme paranoia, nausea, vomiting, and nerve-wracking anxiety.

Nicotine is not safe for youth:



- According to the CDC, nicotine is a naturally occurring **toxic substance** found in tobacco
- It is a highly addictive substance
- Because the teen brain is undergoing massive changes, nicotine may rewire the brain, priming it for future addiction to other substances
- Nicotine can contribute to problems with concentration, learning, and impulse control

Long-lasting or permanent affects of cannabis use on the developing teen brain can include:

- Difficulty with critical thinking skills like attention, problem-solving and memory
- Impaired reaction time and coordination, especially as it relates to driving
- Decline in school performance
- Increased risk of mental health issues including depression or anxiety and in some cases psychosis where there is family history

School Staff can have Meaningful Conversations with Students

There are several things school administrators and staff can do if they suspect a student is vaping. The first step is a conversation. Consider these tips:



- **Be a Good Source of Information**- know the facts regarding the harmful effects of vaping nicotine and cannabis and share that information with students.
- **Show Them You Care**- let them know you care about their health, wellness and success. Spend some quality time talking with them about why they are using nicotine and cannabis. Getting to the root cause of substance use is important.
- **Utilize Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques**- MI is defined as a "collaborative, person-centered form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change". It is grounded in respect, is free of judgment, and focuses on building a rapport with the student.
- **Provide support**- share cessation supports for nicotine addiction like Truth Initiative's [This is Quitting](#), or screen them for cannabis use disorder. The [CRAFFT](#) screening tool is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics for youth age 12-21.

Connect with the Social Workers and Counselors in your school who are equipped to help. They possess a unique skill set, and can share resources.

Additional Learning Opportunities for School Staff:

- From the [FDA Tobacco Education Resources Library](#)- free downloadable fact sheets, posters and lesson plans
- SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral to Treatment) training: Contact [Western CT Coalition](#)
- Restorative Practices and Alternatives to Suspension: View our recorded webinar "[Youth Cannabis Prevention: Alternatives to Suspension and Restorative Practices](#)" with speakers from the New England Prevention Technology Transfer Center
- Article from [We Are Teachers](#)
- Truth Initiative Report- [Discipline Is Not the Answer: Better Approaches to On-campus Student Tobacco Use](#)

Vaping Prevention is Key for All Students!

Visit WCTC's [Vaping Prevention Resources](#) and work with your [Local Prevention Council](#) on prevention strategies like information dissemination, skill building and policies.

Help Support Parents

Parents play a significant role in their child's decision-making. Empowering parents to have conversations with their children about substance use is important. **Share these resources when talking with parents of students you are concerned about:**

- [Talk to Your Teen about E-Cigarettes](#) from the Surgeon General
- [Talk to Kids about the Risks of Vaping](#)- a home guide from the FDA
- American Lung Association [Vaping Conversation Guide](#)
- [Marijuana Talk Kit](#) from Partnership to End Addiction
- [Talk They Hear You](#)- Talking to Kids about Alcohol and Other Drugs

