



RESULTS FROM  
A FOCUS GROUP OF  
LYNNFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS  
HIGH SCHOOL  
PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

CONDUCTED BY  
A HEALTHY LYNNFIELD &  
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION, INC.  
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# RESULTS

## BACKGROUND

- A focus group was convened by *A Healthy Lynnfield* (AHL) on January 30, 2020 with 12 parents/caregivers of high school students in Lynnfield to discuss health and well-being, substance use and related issues, and the potential roles that parents, caregivers, and others can play in supporting youth and preventing risky behaviors.
- Participants were encouraged to think broadly about substance use, including use of alcohol, tobacco or nicotine use (e.g., cigarettes, cigars, vaping, JUUL), marijuana, and other illegal drugs.
- This document summarizes the main themes and provides illustrative comments for each topic area discussed.

## BENEFITS & CHALLENGES TO RAISING A FAMILY IN LYNNFIELD

What are some of the **benefits** to living here and raising a family? **Positive things** about the community.

### Tight-knit sense of community

- Community, small-town, safe, know everyone
  - *My husband grew up here and brought us back, as did many of his contemporaries, which shows the love of the community. For a small town, it offers a lot. People are happy here. And they stay.*
  - *I was born and raised here and love it. Not too big, not too small – goldilocks community. The teachers all know the kids’ names.*
  - *What drew us to Lynnfield was the community. The small town feel in a big area. Kids can still ride their bikes and they know everyone.*



### Schools

- Good schools, small school community, supportive environment for children
  - *What drove us here was the schools and smaller community, including the smaller school community.*
  - *We used to live in another community but felt that community did not provide adequate support. We moved here to be closer to family and Boston, and because of the excellent school system.*
  - *We love the support that my kids get, particularly the emotional support.*

### Active parents

- Parents who want to make their children’s lives better

What are some things that make it **challenging** for parents and caregivers here to raise a family?

### Influence of social media

- Constant youth use of social media, influence on their social and emotional well-being, apps where kids can see where all of their friends are in real-time and realize that they may not have been invited, fear of missing out (FOMO), pressure on parents to allow children to use social media at a younger age
  - *The pressure on kids has become an epidemic. They know about every party, who is there, if they weren’t invited. It causes a lot of anxiety.*
  - *Our youngest isolates himself in his room playing video games. I wonder if he would be more connected to other kids if he was on social media. But I would worry more if he were on social media.*
  - *Other kids looked down on my daughter for not having a phone, and I felt like we had to give in so she didn’t have to go through that. It is happening when they are younger and younger – what is a 2nd grader doing with a phone?*
  - *Social media is their way to connect with the world. The only way they connect is through snapchat. They don't use phone numbers or text messaging anymore. It's not the way it was when we were young. There is pressure on us parents to teach them how to use it properly.*
  - *It's hard to solve conflicts through social media. At some point, people will realize that this isn't an effective way to communicate.*



### Parents/caregivers use of alcohol on school grounds and hosting parties with youth access to alcohol

- Parents drinking on school grounds and allowing their children to have home parties where alcohol is available
  - *There is a lot of parental drinking on school grounds – in the parking lot before football games, red solo cups at youth baseball, school-year "slush party" where parents were drunk. I wish the schools would enforce no alcohol consumption on school property. No drinking. No open containers. The rules are there, but they aren't enforced.*
  - *Some parents allow kids to have parties when the parents are home, and they'll turn a blind eye to alcohol. I was torn because my daughter finally wanted to go out to a party, but I said no because alcohol would be served.*

### Lack of diversity and exposure

- Lack of diversity (ethnically, racially, economically), not much exposure to the real world
  - *They kind of live in this bubble to some extent.*
  - *My child came home from a diverse out-of-state camp and said, "We live in such a bubble. There is so much more out there than Lynnfield offers." Exposing them to what else is out there is a big deal.*

## HEALTH, WELL-BEING, & SUBSTANCE USE AMONG HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH IN LYNNFIELD

What do you feel are the one or two **most pressing challenges** facing the **health and well-being of high school youth** in Lynnfield **right now**? **AND** When you think about **substance use in Lynnfield among high school youth**, what immediately comes to mind? Specific **substances, incidents** or **stories**, things that you are **concerned about**?

### Vaping

- Early exposure to vaping, widespread use, use during school in the bathrooms, use as a coping mechanism
  - *My daughter said, "Mom, the people that vape, you would be completely shocked." And the ages. Kids in 6<sup>th</sup> grade vape.*
  - *It's happening in the schools, during school time.*
  - *My kids don't even like to go into the bathroom because of it.*
  - *A scary thing is the number of kids who are doing it for self-medication – it makes them feel good, stay focused in class.*



### Adderall

- Perceived over-prescribing, parents may perceive medication as more convenient than therapy, concern about desensitization, concern about use among youth with a family history of addiction, concern about college use
  - *Kids are being prescribed medication at young ages so they can be a better student. Kids are identified as having attention issues and parents are encouraged to pursue medication. Kids are de-sensitized to it so early on.*
  - *There are truly kids who need medication. But what if there is addiction in the family?*
  - *It's cheaper and easier to just give a kid a pill rather than having them go to consistent therapy. There is a stigma about therapy for kids and it seems more convenient to just have them take a pill.*
  - *I don't know if this is spilling into high school, but it's just a matter of time. I was doing a college tour with my child and the student tour guide said when we walked through the library that "Everyone is Addied-up." It's everywhere. Kids pop a pill to bang out a 4-hour paper or study session.*

### Future decision-making at college

- Concern about making choices without parental influence once they go to college (e.g., alcohol, Adderall)
  - *I worry about my kids going to college and being exposed to this stuff without me there to help them navigate.*
  - *I worry about what happens when they go to college. They're all very driven. If they go to college and have a paper due, and someone says, "Take this – it will keep you up all night." Will they have the emotional fortitude to say no.*
  - *Our nephew came home from one semester in college and said, "Isn't the point of drinking to get drunk?" I'm scared to death of my kids losing control in college because they don't know their limits. You can't lose control in college.*
  - *If you have a history of addiction in your family and you try alcohol, you're playing Russian Roulette. It's hard to do it responsibly. They need to know that they can become addicts too.*

## Screen time

- Cell phones, social media, computer games
  - *The amount of time that a child is looking at a box. We have a son who is addicted to computer games. We have to hide the computer from him. It's a losing battle. He has to use the computer for schoolwork, and we struggle with that and the amount of time he spends on any device.*
  - *If I can get my kids in one room watching a TV show together, it's great. But when everyone is on their own device, there is no interaction.*

## Confusion about legalized marijuana

- Lack of understanding about laws regarding marijuana use, low perceived harm of use
  - *People are blatantly smoking marijuana on the streets of Boston. Even my kids notice that.*
  - *Marijuana isn't viewed the same way as other substances. I don't think people are concerned about the new law and its consequences – like driving after using marijuana.*

What are some **specific factors in Lynnfield** that you feel may **promote youth substance use** more than others among **high school youth**?

## Pressure

- Academic pressure
  - *The academic pressure is a lot. My daughter does well in school and no matter how well she does, she doesn't feel it's enough.*
- Peer pressure
  - *They pass vapes around in a circle at parties and feel very pressured to just try it.*
  - *They don't want to be the one who says, "I don't want to drink." You don't want to be that person who speaks out against it, because you want to be in the popular crowd. It's not cool to say no.*
  - *You look at how it's acceptable to come out now – everyone respects it. But there's no respect for someone who wants to pass on something. There's just no respect.*
  - *We've told the kids, "You can blame us. You can say that we test you. We will always be your bad guy. Whatever you need to do to get out of a situation, we're the ones. We will be the most horrible people in the world if it gets you out of a situation."*
  - *They need to know that there are many reasons why people choose not to – family history, don't like way it makes them feel, might make them not be able to take part in activities. The more that happens, the more kids will feel comfortable saying no.*



## Social media

- Exposure to risky behaviors on sites like TikTok; desire to model behavior after celebrities; connection between social media, low self-esteem, and substance use
  - *Kids want to do things that their idols do. What if Billie Eilish went up to accept her Grammy and vaped? Would my daughter be more likely to do it? Probably.*
  - *There are many high schoolers who have low self-esteem and substance use makes them feel good and cool. Low self-esteem is connected to social media use. They talk through texting and group text and don't know how to talk about their feelings. They present themselves as OK, but deep down inside they are struggling.*

## Access to alcohol at home

- Ability for youth to take alcohol from their own homes, parents and siblings providing alcohol
  - *I'm paranoid that kids are going to take alcohol when we have parties at home and we're not paying attention.*
  - *Where are they getting all of this alcohol? Probably from their own homes.*
  - *There are a lot of parents who don't see it as a big deal and some kids get alcohol from their parents or siblings. These parents know. We know parents who have parties openly with alcohol there.*

## PREVENTION

Which **key groups or organizations** do you think **should be involved in substance misuse prevention efforts?**

### Sports organizations and coaches

- Connect youth decisions about substance use with participation in sports, consistent messaging from coaches about zero tolerance for substance use, leverage coaches as partners in sharing information about substance use
  - *My kid was on a sports team this year and the coach was very strict that if you were caught in a picture with alcohol, they wouldn't be able to play, even if it was a family party and someone was holding a red solo cup. That scared the hell out of them.*
  - *With soccer, kids are afraid of disappointing the coach. If you are at a party and there's drinking, you're guilty whether you are drinking or not. I hope that's a consistent message from all coaches.*

A word cloud containing the following terms: schools, youth services, community service, support groups, sports, coaches, and zero-tolerance.

### Schools

- Consider making a portion of the community service school graduation requirement related to addiction
  - *Make a portion of the community service requirement to graduate from high school be related to addiction. You could also encourage it through other efforts like confirmation volunteering requirements.*

### Youth mental, emotional, and behavioral health services

- Support groups for youth with addiction issues (e.g., groups for kids who want to stop vaping)
  - *As a high school kid, AA isn't really something that you would go to. Is there something local where kids can get support from each other, with professional guidance?*

What **attitudes or behaviors among adults** in Lynnfield related to youth substance use **need to change?**

### Adults modeling behavior through alcohol use

- Social drinking, intergenerational events (combined parents/kids parties), parents not knowing their limits, kids getting mixed messages
  - *Parents think it's not a big deal. Kids see their parents letting loose and think they can or should do the same, that it will make them feel better.*
  - *Many parents socialize together with their children and sometimes that goes too far. Many parents don't know their limits, don't stop, and their kids see that.*
  - *We're sending super mixed messages. Especially in the summer, all of the families get together and the dads drink beer and moms drink wine. The kids see this, especially the older ones. They're aware of what's happening. They'll say, "You tell me that it's wrong and that's what I hear in school, but you drink."*
  - *It is so much a part of the culture. Whenever we're invited anywhere, alcohol is going to be part of it. The kids see that too. And there are many parents who don't see it as a big deal, and they might allow kids to use.*

A word cloud containing the following terms: adults modeling behavior, kids see that, adult peer pressure, intergenerational, alcohol, and pressure to drink.

### Peer pressure among adults to drink

- Adults pressuring each other to drink in social situations
  - *Parents feel the same pressure to drink. You don't want to be that person to speak out against all of this. It's the same for parents and kids.*
  - *My husband and I don't drink and often get pressured to drink. Our kids see us not drink in social situations. I'm not naive. They may choose to drink, but they see us make the choice not to. It's important for them to know that there are reasons why people choose not to. I feel pressure to this day to fit in.*
  - *It continues into adulthood. I get together with my peers and they pressure me to drink with them.*

## What are some **topics or messages** that you think **would resonate with parents/caregivers**?

### **Social host liability for underage drinking**

- Criminal and civil responsibility for providing alcohol to minors
  - *There are some parents who aren't aware that it is illegal to host children drinking in their homes.*

### **Signs of substance use among youth**

- Your child is not immune, things that might indicate substance use among youth (e.g., information in the "In Plain Sight" interactive display of what parents might find in their teen's room that indicates risk of substance misuse)
  - *I think parents are in denial that their kids are using.*

### **Preparing for post-high school**

- What youth might encounter after high school, substance use on college campuses (e.g., Adderall)
  - *I worry about what my kids will encounter next year when they go to college. These kids who are super-driven and haven't had a huge social life. When they go to college, I'm just so nervous about what they'll encounter and how they'll handle it. Like they might break loose and you won't have as much constant contact with them to counsel them.*

### **Impactful stories from people affected by substance use**

- Hearing from speakers such as parents who have lost children to substance use and addiction
  - *Activities that raise awareness and prompt discussions between kids and their parents. Showing that if you choose to use substances that this might affect your ability to pursue your passions. Associations between the behavior and the potential consequences.*



## What kinds of **information, resources, or supports** are Lynnfield **parents/caregivers** looking for?

### **More mental and emotional health supports for youth**

- Counseling services, mindfulness practices, yoga, ways for coping with anxiety
  - *My daughter will come home after school and just go on the floor and cry about a test. I feel like they do a really good job at the elementary school, but supports this need to be carried up through the grades to the high school.*
  - *Some teachers do mindfulness every day in their class, but time is an issue. Kids need some activity to stay in the present and not think about a test or about what happened on social media that day.*

## SUMMARY POINTS

Benefits of living here	Challenges to living here	Challenges to youth health, including substance use	Factors promoting youth substance use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tight-knit sense of community</li> <li>● Schools</li> <li>● Active parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Influence of social media</li> <li>● Parents/caregivers use of alcohol on school grounds and hosting parties with youth access to alcohol</li> <li>● Lack of diversity and exposure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vaping</li> <li>● Adderall</li> <li>● Future decision-making at college</li> <li>● Screen time</li> <li>● Confusion about legalized marijuana</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pressure (academic, peer)</li> <li>● Social media</li> <li>● Access to alcohol at home</li> </ul>
Key groups to involve in prevention efforts	Adult behaviors that need to change	Messages that would resonate with parents	Resources that parents want
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sports organizations and coaches</li> <li>● Schools</li> <li>● Youth mental, emotional, and behavioral health services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adults modeling behavior through alcohol use</li> <li>● Peer pressure among adults to drink</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social host liability for underage drinking</li> <li>● Signs of substance use among youth</li> <li>● Preparing for post-high school</li> <li>● Impactful stories from people affected by substance use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More mental and emotional health supports for youth</li> </ul>