



RESULTS FROM
A FOCUS GROUP OF
LYNNFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
IN GRADES 9 & 10

CONDUCTED BY
A HEALTHY LYNNFIELD &
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION, INC.
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RESULTS – GRADES 9 & 10

- On February 11, 2021, A Healthy Lynnfield (AHL) convened a focus group with Lynnfield High School students representing grades 9 and 10 to discuss health and well-being, substance use and related issues, and how AHL and others can support youth to make good decisions about their health. A similar focus group was conducted on February 10 for representatives from grades 11 and 12.
- This session took place after school when Lynnfield High School was operating in hybrid mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which most students attended school two days a week on-site and remotely on other days.
- AHL attempted to obtain a total sample of 12 students representing both the freshman and sophomore classes. Participation was voluntary and parental permission was required. Six (6) students participated in the focus group. Four (4) of the 6 participants were on-site during the session and 2 participated through videoconferencing. Participants were equally split between freshmen (3) and sophomores (3). All 6 were female.
- Participants were encouraged to think broadly about substance use, including use of alcohol (beer, hard seltzer or cider, wine, liquor like vodka), tobacco and nicotine (cigarettes, vaping), marijuana (smoking, vaping, edibles), and someone using prescription drugs (Adderall, Oxycontin) that either were not prescribed for them or in a way that they aren't supposed to.
- This document summarizes the main themes and provides illustrative comments for each topic area discussed.

LIFE IN LYNNFIELD

What are some of the **things you like about living in Lynnfield?** Positive things about the community.

Community (tight knit, welcoming, friendly, supportive)

- *It's a very tight knit community. Everyone knows a good amount of people. There's a lot of people to hang out with.*
- *Everyone is nice.*
- *Everyone is very helpful, especially when you're going through something.*
- *Everyone is really supportive.*

Schools (good school system, nice people)

- *Everyone seems welcoming, especially in the schools.*
- *People in the schools are really friendly.*
- *Students and kids in schools are really nice.*
- *Good school system.*
- *Schools.*

Variety of activities (music, theater, arts, sports)

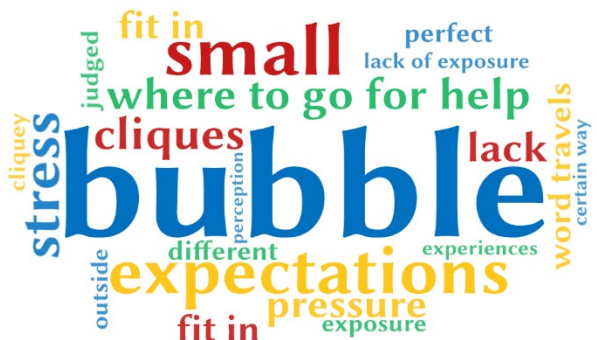
- *I like how there's a wide variety of things people can do. A lot of schools are more focused on sports. People like sports, but there's music, theater... if you want to do something else, there's always a community you can go to.*
- *The arts programs and music. There are a lot of different programs in Lynnfield and that's nice.*
- *The sports.*



What are some **things that you don't like or that make it challenging** for people your age in Lynnfield?

Drawbacks to small community (lack of exposure in "bubble," word travels quickly, negative perception from the outside looking in, fewer options and experiences)

- *We're not exposed to other things in life. Everything we grew up with seems more perfect. We don't get as many experiences or learn as much because we are in a bubble.*
- *I feel like Lynnfield's almost a bubble. It's small and everyone knows a good amount of people. Sometimes, other towns looking in, see that Lynnfield has good jobs and bigger houses, and sometimes they see us as rude.*
- *I feel that the fact that it is small can benefit negatively and positively, because as a small town, things get around really quickly. In a small town, you can't really do as much as you want to because there not a lot of options.*



Drawbacks to small school (cliques, stress)

- We have a relatively small school, small number of students, and sometimes groups can get really cliquy.
- Definitely cliquy.
- The school system can get stressful.

Pressure (to excel, to fit in)

- Expectations... everything has to be perfect.
- You have to look a certain way, talk a certain way. If I say something wrong, am I going to get judged?
- If you look different than what everyone thinks you should look like or what the trend is, you'll get judged for it. They'll look at you, talk about you. It's not very nice.

Not knowing where to get help for selves or friends

- If I had something going on wrong with me, I don't know where to go. If I was stressed out with school work, I could talk to a teacher, but other than that I don't really know.
- Sometimes a teacher can't really help, a friend really can't help.
- I'd like to know how to help or talk to my friend.
- [Talking to or helping a friend] depends on your own experiences. They may have something different going on in their life than you do.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

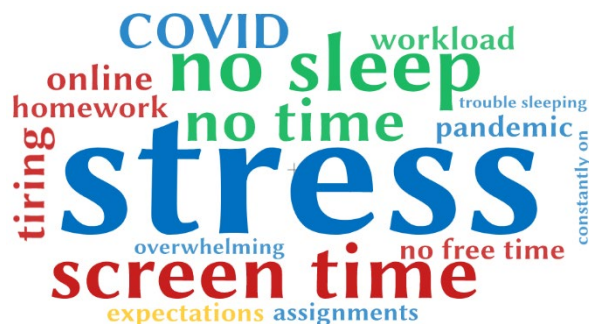
What do you feel are the one or two **most important things that impact the health of Lynnfield High School students right now?**

Stress (general, COVID-related)

- Stress.
- The pandemic and the stress it's putting on us.
- I feel like all the expectations are still the same, but then there's also our world falling apart, so it's hard to keep up with them.

School workload (time devoted to schoolwork, tiring nature of online classes and homework, lack of free time)

- It honestly feels like the day isn't mine anymore, like it's the school's day. I don't have control of what's going on with my life anymore.
- I feel like the assignments have doubled. There's a lot of work. Like 15 assignments. You don't have any time to do anything else. You're just doing schoolwork all day.
- There's extracurriculars but it's not enough.
- By the time you finish your work it's 8 o'clock and dark out. I have activities, but it's not enough. When you finish your schoolwork it's dark, and you can't do anything with your day.



Time spent on the computer both during school and for homework

- Screen time is a really big thing, especially now. After school I don't even want to look at my phone. You're on the computer all day for school. It's a lot on your eyes. Yes, it's only 2-3 days with cohorts, but it's really hard.
- We look at [a computer screen] 6 hours in school (Thursday/Friday cohort), then you get so much homework.
- You're always looking at a computer in some way.
- It's getting overwhelming, honestly.

Lack of adequate and quality sleep (sleep deprivation, trouble falling asleep, trying to have "own time" after school means staying up later)

- There is a lot of sleep deprivation. You have your schoolwork and then you want your own time, so then you stay up late doing something you want to do and don't sleep.
- I have trouble falling asleep. We're constantly on, constantly worried about schoolwork.
- Less sleep, more tired.

SUBSTANCE USE

When you think about **substance use in Lynnfield among high school youth**, what immediately comes to mind?

Risks involved (overdose, DUI)

- I feel like it's the overdose. People want to do it, and then they do too much, and then they overdose.
- I know the story about a girl. My cousin lives far away. A girl... she passed away. She got in a car with someone drinking, she got in the front seat and got in an accident, and died. It was really devastating.

Stress-related use (general, COVID-related)

- Especially with stress.
- It is more popular to do drugs now because you're overwhelmed with the pandemic.

Less exposure due to COVID (not hanging out with friends so less opportunity to use or hear about others using)

- Because of COVID, you aren't hanging out with friends as much or hearing as much.
- There is a big impact on how the grades split: you're not hanging out with everyone, so you don't know what everyone's going through.

Exposure increasing with age (limited exposure so far but anticipating more)

- I think it is our age [9th/10th grade]. We're coming up on that age when you start to hear about it more.
- I would say in Lynnfield, I have not been around drugs. No one has asked me before.

Most use starts in groups (social), using alone associated with addiction

- It starts in groups and then leads to being alone with an addiction where it's alone and not with friends anymore.
- People usually want to do it together.
- Some people drink alone. For others it starts at parties.

Specific substances

● Overall

- I haven't been around drugs and haven't experienced it yet, but I do have an older sister – alcohol, vaping, weed are definitely the top three.

● Alcohol (seltzer and other sweetened alcohol drinks, advertised drinks)

- Seltzers.
- I've been on the big stadium field for practice and there would be beer cans all over the place. Advertising is trying to get kids. It's a lot of the flavored hard seltzers – White Claw, Truly – those were everywhere on the field and we had to pick them up.
- The sweeter stuff – what's advertised.
- Kids are drinking seltzers.
- Not the stuff that parents drink like hard liquor, vodka, or whiskey.
- I feel like summer and winter, it's really popular.

● Vaping (normalized, nicotine, in school bathrooms)

- I hear a lot about it on TikTok. It's normalized to see kids vaping.
- The school parking lot and school bathroom.
- The bathrooms.
- I think kids are vaping nicotine.
- I think it's mainly nicotine.

● Marijuana (not much personal exposure yet, exposure in the broader community)

- I honestly feel like it's an upperclassmen thing. I hear about it from my upperclassmen friends.
- If you look at my neighborhood, it seems like a very normal, nice neighborhood. But there are like four weed dealers. We had a [violent incident involving one of the dealers] and the police tried to help the community out.



How do Lynnfield high school youth get substances? Who or where do they get them from?

Home (alcohol)

- Parents providing it to kids
 - I think a lot alcohol comes from home. I think there might be parents who provide kids with alcohol.
 - Parents supplying their own kids with alcohol. I've heard that.
 - I've heard that too.
 - I've heard that from my older siblings too.
- Kids taking it from home
 - Assuming, thinking logically, when people's parents are out for the night, they steal something. It's like quick access from a bar and they just take it. Parents wouldn't know it was missing.
 - If they have a lot, they won't know it's missing.



Other sources

- Older friends (alcohol)
 - I have an older sibling too. I think from older friends... probably like 18 [years old].
- Third-party sales (alcohol)
 - "Dealers" are selling alcohol to underage kids.
- Local stores (vapes)
 - People have caught a local downtown establishment selling vapes to underage kids.
 - It's disgusting and annoying – why would you do that?
- Online (vapes)
 - You can order stuff online. I have seen TikToks for people selling vapes but they disguise it as something else.

Where do Lynnfield high school youth use substances?

Homes (house parties, including those where parents supply alcohol; less common during COVID because kids aren't going out and parents aren't going away as much)

- People's houses.
- Basements.
- Parties.
- Before, parents allowed big parties. Now everyone is staying home and parents aren't allowing as many kids over. Parents are also not going away as much.
- People are keeping their social circle really low to prevent being exposed and having to quarantine for two weeks.
- There's definitely some parties. I have heard of some parties this year.
- I feel like the same type of parents who let their kids drink and give them alcohol are the same ones allowing parties.



Open areas (more common in outside spaces like parking lots during COVID, particularly alcohol use)

- Empty parking lots.
- Because of COVID, there's an increase in kids drinking in the parking lots and fields, because if their parents aren't allowing them to be inside with their friends, then they'll just drive to the high school to hang out with friends.
- Stadium, fields.
- Cars.
- Drinking around fire pits is a big thing right now because parents will allow them to do that in the backyard.

School bathrooms (vaping)

- Bathrooms.

How common is it for Lynnfield high school youth to **post online** about substance use?

Lynnfield youth use Snapchat (private stories) and Instagram

- Snapchat is Lynnfield kids.
- Snapchat, private stories. Because you can pick who can see it.
- Kids use the private stories.
- I've seen red Solo cups.
- People put emojis on their posts to cover it up on Instagram. It might not even be alcohol, but they just do it.

TikTok is usually use from outside of Lynnfield

- You see it on TikTok, but not really from Lynnfield.
- TikTok – you see it more from [everywhere else].

Not common for Lynnfield youth to post about vaping

- Definitely not vaping. Some people think it's cool and have it in their pocket, but they don't post. It's kind of subtle.

Why do you think some Lynnfield high school youth **choose to use** substances? Are there specific things in Lynnfield that **may promote or contribute** to youth substance use?

Stress and stressful situations (dealing with stress, coping and self-medication for anxiety and depression)

- If someone is stressed out.
- What they are going through, because of their family situations.
- School stress.
- Lynnfield has high expectations for grades and things.
- Adding onto another category of stress, there could be family, school, but it could also be what's going on in the world right now. People are overwhelmed and feel like doing drugs might help them relax and kind of forget about what's going on.
- I feel like depression and anxiety is high at this age and they need a way to cope with it and they use it instead of medication.
- Kids are using it because they don't know where to go to at school for help and are not comfortable talking with family or friends.

Social influences (seeing others use, wanting to fit in, wanting to be social)

- If someone else is doing it.
- I feel like it's social norms, everybody does it.
- You want to be cool.
- People just want to fit in.
- It's a way to meet new people – you get to talk to more people, socialize, be friends with other people.

Parental influences (kids feeling it's normal to drink because their parents do)

- I feel like if parents do it then children think it's okay to do it.
- I'm sure there's a lot of people who care, but there's a good amount of parents who don't care. Parents are out drinking. Kids are used to that. Kids think it's okay because their parents do it. Alcohol is normalized in Lynnfield.

PREVENTION

What is it like for Lynnfield High School youth who **choose NOT** to use?

Youth who choose not to use aren't treated differently

- I don't notice anything bad.
- I feel like people respect others' decisions.
- I have not experienced anything, but I feel like if you went to a party and said no, you could just walk away.
- It's still the same.

A word cloud where 'snapchat' is the largest word in blue, 'private stories' is in red, 'instagram' is in yellow, and 'TikTok' is in green.

A word cloud with 'stress' as the largest word in blue. Other words include 'coping' in red, 'self-medication' in green, 'anxiety and depression' in blue, 'normal expectations' in blue, 'school stress' in green, 'want to fit in' in green, 'seeing others do it' in green, 'seeing parents drink' in red, 'be social' in blue, 'don't know where to get help' in green, and 'COVID' in yellow.

A word cloud with 'supported' as the largest word in blue. Other words include 'respect others' in yellow, 'transitions' in red, 'not treated differently' in green, 'friend group may shrink' in green, 'judged' in red, and 'more stress to say no' in green.

Pressures begin during the transition years for freshmen and sophomores (exposure, friend group changes)

- Freshman and sophomore year is when things are happening. It is when you are asked to do drugs, when your friend groups are changing. It's important to have a strong support group and know what resources we have.
- We are losing more friends because they want to do drugs and, when we say no, our friend groups get smaller.
- It puts more stress on you when you say no. They put pressure on you and judge you because you don't use alcohol or drugs. I have not experienced this, but I know other people feel judged because they're not doing it.

What attitudes or behaviors in Lynnfield related to substance use do you feel need to change?

More emphasis on mental health

- Really listen to youth
 - Mental health is a big thing. Sometimes people say they are listening to us when we're trying to express our emotions, but they aren't really listening, so you don't feel that sense of relief and you don't know how to take out your emotions.
 - Feeling of being ignored.
 - Other people... friends, family... relying on you... their emotions. People use you to listen, but they won't listen back. You take it in and you don't know how to deal with your emotions.
- Understand compounding stress (including COVID)
 - Adding on to all the other stress – school, sports, social life – and then adding on everything else.
 - Levels of stress, anxiety, and depression have shot up. Everyone I talk to is stressed out. I feel like they are good at masking their emotions.
- Teach about mental health in school
 - Mental health is not as big a thing as it should be in the schools.
 - In middle school we learned a lot about drugs and alcohol and how to prevent it but we did not learn about mental health.
 - Yeah, we don't learn about it in high school either. Mental health is brushed aside.
 - I agree. We should talk more about it.
- Enhance school-based health education
 - Freshman is the only year we have health. I feel like it would be good to have it more.
 - One of my classes is more of a discussion and that's better than having a teacher talk. It's a lot better that way.
 - I feel like discussion is such a key point in learning things. School now... everyone is so bored and people aren't taking in what they're learning. Health class can be a discussion without stress – literally like this [focus group discussion]. I would love time during the day to talk about something that is bothering me, or that is going wrong, about vaping, or anything.
 - Yeah, that is what a Compass [free advisory block] was. We had a senior advisor and we would just talk.
 - Health shouldn't be a class where we're graded because that adds stress, but a discussion. I feel like we used to do that in Compass, but we don't have a Compass.
 - I don't think freshmen know what Compass is.
 - In middle school, we spent literally two plus years talking about vaping. Alcohol is used the most. It's dangerous. I remember I had health class and we talked about alcohol for 10 minutes the whole time I was there.

A word cloud graphic with the following text: "masking emotions" (vertical, green), "not listening to us" (vertical, red), "compounding stress" (vertical, yellow), "mental health ignored" (horizontal, blue), "more discussion" (horizontal, red), "teach mental health" (horizontal, yellow), and "improved health classes" (horizontal, red).

Can you think of any examples of positive things Lynnfield is already doing to prevent substance use among high school youth? [Discussion expanded to things happening beyond Lynnfield.]

Messaging related to substance use

- Speakers
 - In middle school, there were a lot of people [speakers] who would come talk to us about personal experiences they had with the negative consequences of drugs and alcohol. That was very nice.
 - Speakers were a good way to connect.

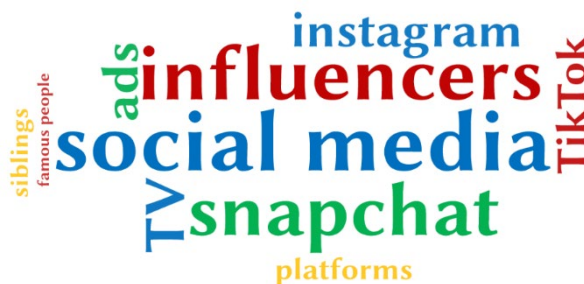
A word cloud graphic with the following text: "commercials" (vertical, green), "speakers" (horizontal, blue), and "targeted website ads" (horizontal, red).

- **Commercials**
 - Some commercials on TV that say don't do alcohol or drugs.
 - There was a TV commercial where someone was throwing a vape in the toilet.
- **Targeted website messaging**
 - Quizlet is a study site to use to make flashcards. Ads will pop up from a foundation about preventing vaping with kids. That is very smart because they know it's going to reach a lot of kids and teach the negative impacts of using.

What are some of the best ways to reach youth? Who do you listen to?

Social media

- If you want to reach a huge population of teens, TikTok, Instagram, ads on Snapchat – anything social media.
- Every once in a while, an Instagram ad pops up where people talk about how they are quitting vaping.



Influencers (famous people followed on social media)

- I think that people our age follow influencers, famous people, and what messages they have. If they say it's not OK then people listen to that.
- Influencers come from social media. People with big platforms.

Older siblings

- I have older siblings and recognize that they didn't make bad decisions in high school. There were a good influence.
- Older siblings.

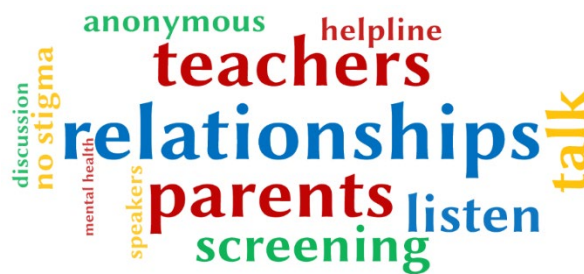
TV (news, commercials)

- Probably the news... about college campuses.
- Commercials.

What else should be in place or what else could be done to help prevent youth substance use in Lynnfield – information, resources, supports?

Encourage strong relationships between youth and adults (teachers, parents)

- Just because school is so different now [because of the pandemic], the relationship between teachers and students isn't the strongest. I don't feel like I can go up to my teachers and talk to them. They are nice, but I don't feel like they talk to us on a personal level.
- Kids are following after their parents. Parents have the most impact.
- In one of my classes, it's more of a discussion and people are more comfortable talking that way.
- I feel like we need a group where kids who are thinking about or using can talk about [things like] substance use or overdosing. Something informative.



Use messaging that doesn't stigmatize

- I think it's important not to judge people who have an addiction because then they won't want to reach out for help. When you talk about it in school, you have to be careful about words that you use.
- You should ask if they need help, but don't tell them to stop because they are not going to listen.

Screening and assessment (anonymous check-ins)

- Mental health resources... like a check in... teachers sending out an anonymous google form for people to fill out anonymously to talk about things.
- I like the anonymous idea because people might feel nervous about talking about it, so if their name is masked, they feel better expressing their emotions.

Make students aware of available resources (counselors, helplines)

- *On the Lynnfield Public Schools website, almost like a helpline, for anything – drugs, family problems, suicide, mental health. Don't just put it there and expect people to know about it – you have to advertise it. We're not aware of that [helplines already existing for mental health and substance use].*

More guest speakers

- *More guest speakers that can tell their story.*
- *Maybe speakers that have been influenced by their mental health or the mental health of others.*

SUMMARY POINTS – GRADES 9 & 10

Benefits & challenges to living here	Impacts on youth health	Substance use among LHS students
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community (tight knit, welcoming, friendly, supportive) ● Schools (good school system, nice people) ● Variety of activities (music, theater, arts, sports) <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Drawbacks to small <i>community</i> (lack of exposure in "bubble," word travels quickly, negative perception from the outside looking in, fewer options and experiences) ● Drawbacks to small <i>school</i> (cliques, stress) ● Pressure (to excel, to fit in) ● Not knowing where to get help for selves or friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stress (general, COVID-related) ● School workload (time devoted to schoolwork, tiring nature of online classes and homework, lack of free time) ● Time spent on the computer both during school and for homework ● Lack of adequate and quality sleep (sleep deprivation, trouble falling asleep, trying to have "own time" after school means staying up later) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Risks involved (overdose, DUI) ● Stress-related use (general, COVID-related) ● Less exposure due to COVID (not hanging out with friends so less opportunity to use substances or hear about others using) ● Exposure increasing with age (limited exposure so far but anticipating more as they get older) ● Specific substances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Alcohol (seltzer and other sweetened alcohol drinks, advertised drinks) – Vaping (normalized, nicotine, in school bathrooms) – Marijuana (not much personal exposure yet, exposure in the broader community)
<p>How youth use (groups vs. alone)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most use starts in groups (social), using alone is associated with addiction 	<p>How youth get substances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Home (alcohol) – parents providing it to kids, kids taking it from home ● Other sources – older friends (alcohol), third-party sales (alcohol), local stores (vapes), online (vapes) 	<p>Where youth use substances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Homes (house parties, including those where parents supply alcohol; less common during COVID because kids aren't going out and parents aren't going away as much) ● Open areas (more common in outside spaces like parking lots during COVID, particularly alcohol use) ● School bathrooms (vaping)
<p>Why youth use substances & things that promote youth use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stress and stressful situations (dealing with stress, coping and self-medication for anxiety and depression) ● Social influences (seeing others use, wanting to fit in, wanting to be social) ● Parental influences 	<p>What it's like for youth who don't use substances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth who choose not to use aren't treated differently ● Pressures begin during the transition years for freshmen and sophomores (exposure, friend group changes) 	<p>Messaging & messengers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social media ● Influencers (famous people followed on social media) ● Older siblings ● TV (news, commercials)
<p>Things that need to change</p>	<p>Positive things Lynnfield is doing & what else should be done</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More emphasis on mental health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Really listen to youth – Understand compounding stress (including COVID) – Teach about mental health in school – Enhance school-based health education 	<p>Positive things Lynnfield is doing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Messaging related to substance use (speakers, commercials, targeted website messaging) <p>What else should be done</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage strong relationships between youth and adults (teachers, parents) ● Use messaging that doesn't stigmatize ● Screening and assessment (anonymous check-ins) ● Make students aware of available resources (counselors, helplines) ● More guest speakers 	