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Greene County Public Health

Melissa Howell MS, MBA, MPH, RN, RS, Health Commissioner
Kevin L. Sharrett, MD, Medical Director

Press Release

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Contact: Laurie Fox, Public Information Officer
937-374-5669 office / 937-283-5178 cell
lfox@gcph.info

6-Part Series, “DISCONNECT TO CONNECT” to Address Mental Health of Children and Youth in a Digital World *Local Agencies Form Partnership to Share Information, Tips, Techniques & Strategies*

GREENE COUNTY, OH -- The series “**DISCONNECT TO CONNECT**” is a movement Greene County community partners are implementing to raise awareness about the mental health crisis facing our children and youth. This awareness campaign is not designed to attach any causal relationship between technology use and mental well-being. Instead, it is an effort to uncover how children, youth and families make use of technology and how to find the balance between productive use and avoiding or minimizing any harmful aspects. We all have a role to play.

Although mental health challenges in this age group were already a growing concern, rates of psychological distress among young people have increased even more since the COVID-19 pandemic began. A recent advisory by the U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A, details the situation. Below are some alarming statistics highlighted in the advisory.

- 80,000 youth globally found that depressive and anxiety symptoms doubled during the pandemic
- 25% of those 80,000 youth experienced depressive symptoms and 20% experienced anxiety symptoms
- impulsivity and irritability—associated with conditions such as ADHD— appear to have moderately increased
- emergency department visits in the United States for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher for adolescent girls and 4% higher for adolescent boys compared to the same time in early 2019
- Half of all mental health issues begin by age 14 and three-quarters emerge by the mid-20s.
- 70% of teens with mental health needs do not receive appropriate care

The advisory also cited various hypotheses proposed by scientists to explain these trends in reporting of mental health challenges with one of those being the growing use of digital media.

There are environmental factors outside of our control (positive and negative life experiences), personality and coping styles, and biological factors (genes and brain chemistry) that impact the mental health and wellbeing of our children and youth. However, there are external factors that we collectively have the power to adjust such

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360 Wilson Drive • Xenia, Ohio 45385
(937) 374-5600 • toll free (866) 858-3588 • Fax (937) 374-5675
www.gcph.info



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as quantity and quality of our digital use. While computers, smart phones, and tablets play an important role in education and enhance our lives in many ways, excessive or inappropriate use are cause for concern.

Greene County Public Health officials, along with the Mental Health Recovery Board of Clark, Greene and Madison Counties, the Greene County Public Library, Greene County Children Services, Greene County Family & Children First Council, the Greene County Career Center, and the Greene County Educational Service Center are working collaboratively to raise community awareness of the problem along with providing resources and practical information to help children, youth, educators, parents, families, and community organizations make impactful changes toward improving mental health and wellbeing of Greene County's future: our young people!

Over the next several months, a six-part series, beginning with this article will focus on a specific age group and things we all can do to support mental health and resilience in our youngest residents:

- Infants to preschoolers – April
- Elementary and middle school students – May
- High School students – June
- College students – July
- Educators, parents, community at large – August

These articles will be featured in the Greene County Dailies during the third week of each month. In addition to the articles, these community partners will also be producing materials to be distributed via local schools and community libraries that will highlight helpful tips, information, and community resources. Supportive information and infographics will be shared countywide throughout this series and beyond.

“DISCONNECT TO CONNECT”...finding balance in a digital world to improve the mental health and well-being of our children, youth and families. There is something each of us can do!



A special thank you to the students at the Greene County Career Center for the development of the logo for this project. You can see the full advisory from U.S. Surgeon General here:

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

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