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OPENING
REMARKS &
INTRODUCTION



PREVENTION IN ACTION
Bringing Co-Occurring
Disorders (COD) Prevention
to Schools and Communities

Stephanie Marquesano
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the harris project



Prevention in Action: Bringing Co-Occurring Disorders (COD) Prevention to Schools and Communities




Stephanie Marquesano, Founder and President, The Harris Project Inc.

Session Objectives:


- Explore the rationale, development, and purpose of the Co-Occurring Disorders (COD) Curriculum as a first-of-its-kind prevention model integrating mental health and substance use education.
- Discuss how the COD Curriculum promotes resilience, refusal skills, help-seeking, and connection to trusted adults among youth and extends learning to parents, caregivers, and school or community staff.
- Identify strategies to implement and sustain the COD Curriculum through training, technical assistance, and alignment with existing prevention and public health initiatives.






Nonprofit focused on improving the lives of teens and young adults with, or at risk of developing, co-occurring disorders:

- Integration from prevention to sustainable recovery
 - government - de-silo agencies, value of co-occurring competency across continuum
 - **prevention** - **Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness**
 - providers/agencies – support building infrastructure
 - clinicians – quality improvement and core competency, utilizing evidence-based treatment modalities – Encompass/SAMHSA Tree
 - support for family and loved ones






Harris's story

- diagnosed as a young child with an anxiety disorder and as an early teen with ADHD
- ongoing treatment with psychiatrists and psychologists – **they never talked about link**
- began self-medicating with marijuana, and then with prescription pills towards the end of high school – **importance of staying connected to supports**
- within a year and a half before his death: 1 short term mental health in-patient program, 2 substance use out-patient programs, 4 substance use in-patient programs

Once Harris entered the substance rehabilitation system, no focus on the mental health piece!



Fast facts

- 49.5% of US youth will face a mental health challenge
- 22% have a mental health disorder with “significant impact”
- 50% of lifetime mental health disorders begin by age 14, 75% by age 24
- Only about 20% of youth in need of mental health services receive them
- Approximately 50% of youth receiving services for their mental health have a co-occurring substance use disorder
- Approximately 65% of youth receiving treatment for a substance use disorder have a co-occurring mental health disorder
- **More than 21 million Americans have co-occurring disorders**



Developing Co-occurring disorders

- Existing or emerging mental health disorder(s) - using substances to feel typical, reduce stress, elevate mood, self-medicate
- Predisposition to both mental health and substance use disorders
 - genetics, family history, biology
 - environmental factors
- Substance use
 - brain isn't fully developed until 25 or later
 - alcohol, nicotine, marijuana (smoking, vaping, edibles), illicit substances, prescription medication – can cause brain changes particularly in those 25 and under
 - impact of legal prescriptions – sports injury, wisdom tooth removal
- Other considerations – trauma



A Public Health Crisis In Plain Sight

Overdose Deaths.	105,000
Suicide.	49,000
Alcohol Deaths.	178,000

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Why mental health
matters when it
comes to substance
use prevention...

The time between onset of a
mental health disorder and
subsequent substance use
disorder is a “key window of
opportunity” where COD can
be prevented.

Treating Adolescents with
Co-Occurring Disorders,
Hills, 2007

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CODA – Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness

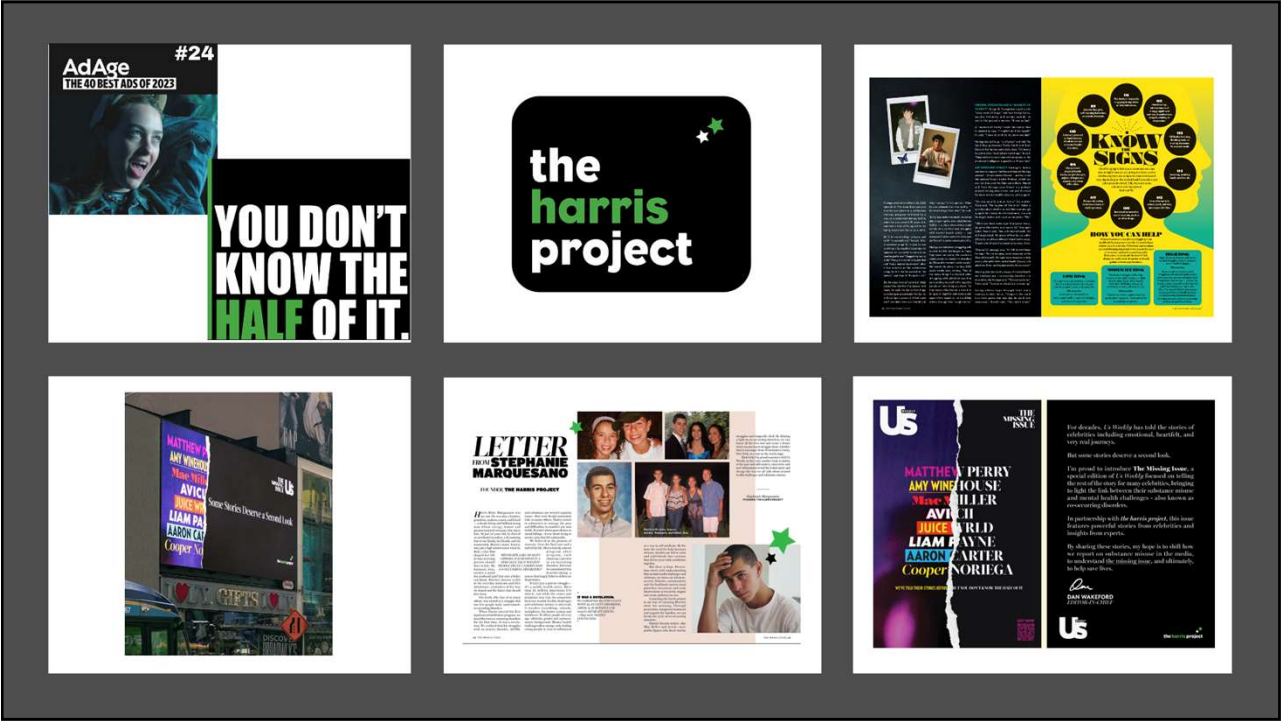
A youth-driven movement empowering young people and the adults that care about them by:

- increasing awareness and understanding of COD, highlighting paths to substance misuse/addiction
- increasing early intervention for mental health challenges and substance misuse associated with a decline in:
 - youth mental health crises
 - overdose
 - suicide
 - alcohol-related deaths
- increasing help-seeking behavior in those with or at risk of developing COD
- creating a generation without the stigma typically associated with mental health challenges/substance use issues
- empowering a broad range of youth leaders who can create positive impact with peers

CODA in action

- Youth Summit
- Awareness Games
- April CODA Week Celebrations
- Social Emotional Tools
- Social Media and Poster Campaigns
- Presentations & Programs
- Infusing CODA in traditional mental health and substance use programming







Multi-prong approach to CODA

Over 40 diverse school districts in Westchester County, plus additional activities and support across the region

- Students –highly motivated
- School Administrators
- Counseling staff
- Coalitions
- Family universities
- field
- stage
- Local Government Partners
- Athletic Presence
- Middle School Opportunities

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT



Opioid settlement funds - role of state & local government

- Innovation
 - Collaboration
 - Assessment
 - Consistent
 - Sustainability
- Partnership to End Addiction
 - the harris project
 - Coalitions
 - School Districts
 - Faith Community
 - Pace University



Prevention Curricula *



- Tailored for high school students and adult supports
- Common language and understanding
- Integrates evidence-based approaches with relatable scenarios
- Includes refusal skills, identifying trusted adults, and increasing help-seeking behaviors
- Three sessions for students; and one-hour sessions for school/community supports and parents/caregivers

*in collaboration with Partnership to End Addiction, 3 coalitions, faith funded through a local opioid settlement award.



Stakeholder Engagement

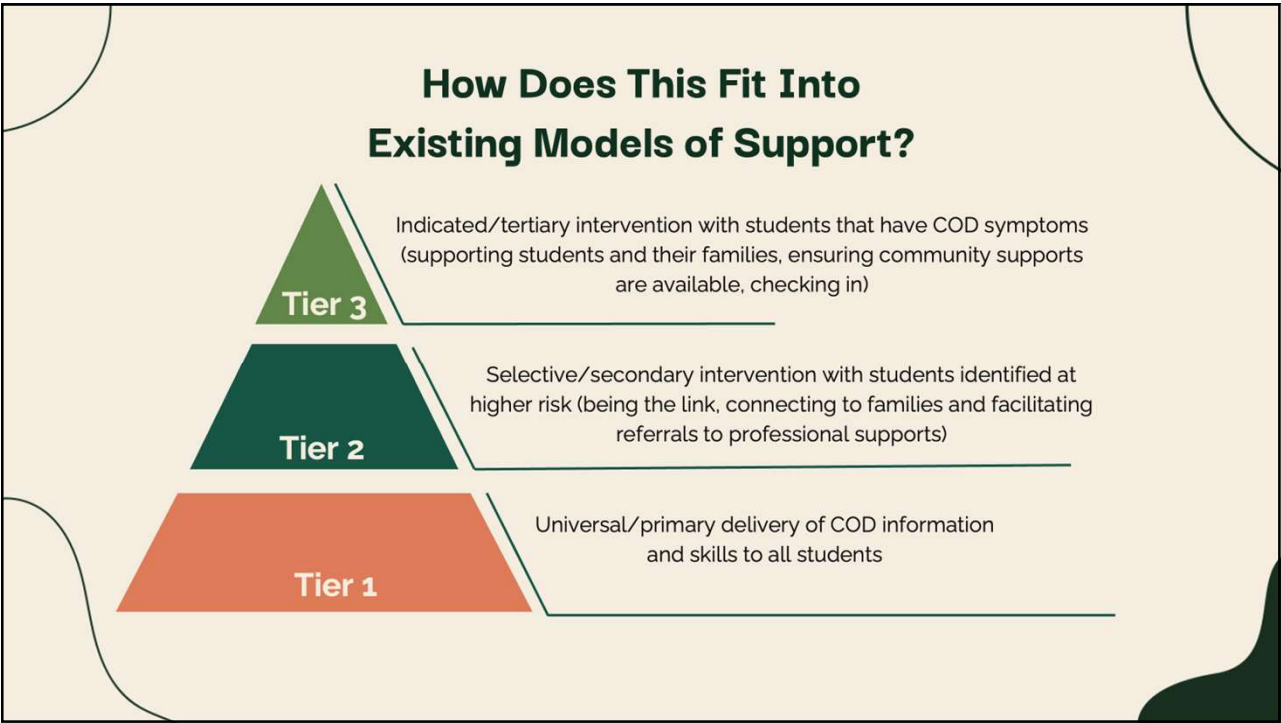


Importance of collaboration:


- Schools: Incorporating curriculum into health and wellness classes
- Families: Empowering parents to have informed conversations
- Community organizations: Common language and better understanding about the link between mental health challenges and substance use issues

Building trust to overcome stigma and foster participation




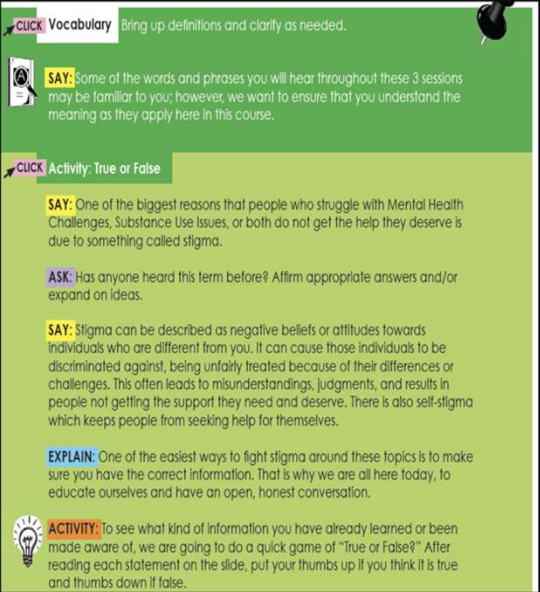


Delivering Prevention Curriculum




- 3 sessions for high school students (1 class period each) or as single “dine and learn” 2.5 hour session
- 1-hour session for parents and caregivers
- 1-hour session for school personnel, faith and community leaders, and coaches





SESSION 1: Introduction to COD & Mental Health

- define COD
- common mental health challenges
- risk and protective factors for developing COD
- healthy vs. unhealthy coping skills
- identify a trusted adult



Co-Occurring Disorders (COD)



The combination of both a Mental Health Challenge and a Substance Use Issue

Why does Mental Health matter when talking about Substance Use?



CLICK Activity Handout: What's Important to Me?

SAY: Before we go into the content of this session, we are going to take a moment to complete an activity about our own priorities and values. We ended last session discussing potential strategies to help ourselves or a friend when faced with mental health challenges, as well as the importance of adult intervention at times.

EXPLAIN: This activity, called "What's Important To Me?," gives us the opportunity to reflect on the things, people, and places in our lives that are meaningful and fulfilling to us. While, at the same time, thinking about challenges we might be facing. When we have a better grasp on them, we can communicate

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more effectively to others so that reaching out for support or solutions is more successful. It also encourages us to recognize our personal strengths and think about how we can use those strengths to overcome challenges and support our own well-being.

ACTIVITY: Review each prompt on the worksheet, and then encourage students to take a few minutes to write down one or two responses to each. Once completed, encourage students to share at least one thing (that feels comfortable to share) with the people in their group. This can also be done as a full group share back.

ASK: How did it feel to complete this activity? And to share with others? Did you notice any differences or similarities among what was shared in the group?

SESSION 2: Substance Use & Transition into COD Content

- common substances of misuse
- legal medication use that can increase risk for COD (eg: opioids for surgery, sports injuries)
- heightened risk in current drug landscape
- knowing the risks, what's the attraction?
- three pathways to developing COD




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Interactive Exercise

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO ME

What are the things that are important to you at the moment?	Are there particular struggles/challenges that you're facing?
When you have a good day, what are the things that make it good?	What are your strengths? How do you use those strengths to face challenges?



#CODAConnects #BeTheLink @theharrisprojectCOD theharrisproject.org

CODA

Given the Risks, What is the Attraction?

- Self-medicating
 - to feel "okay" (whatever that means to the person)
 - to attempt to cope with painful, unwanted thoughts/feelings
 - to relax/calm anxieties and stress
 - to boost energy, attention, or enhance performance
 - to address sleep and appetite challenges
 - to make socializing easier, appearing more confident or talkative
- Curiosity, experimentation, and boredom
- Lack of immediate consequences – legal, at home or school, physical
- Peer pressure
- Learned behavior – family/social norms

SAY: Some of us are introverted and shy, others want to make those around us happy, and some may have a fear of conflict. When faced with an opportunity or invitation to use substances that we have no interest in partaking in, we may struggle to be assertive, set boundaries, and say no with conviction. While "peer pressure" has been cited through the decades as one of the main reasons young people try and/or use substances, direct peer pressure to use is less common now than it was in the past. Instead, the pressures may be more subtle and primarily come from a desire to do what your peers or people you like or admire are doing or to not stand out as different or strange. When faced with either direct or subtle pressure, there are many options for avoiding using substances that are more natural and empowering than just trying to muster the courage to shout NO or do something different from what those around us are doing.

EXPLAIN: Think back to what you wrote during the "What's Important To Me?" activity. Remembering your values, priorities, and goals can sometimes make saying no easier. Are you an athlete who prioritizes physical health? Is the future you want for yourself clear? Do you value your relationships?

CLICK Direct Communication: They Say, You Say

EXPLAIN: It can be helpful to prepare for a situation you may find yourself in that can be risky for your health or safety or leaves you feeling uncomfortable. Now we are going to explore how true "refusal skills" are less about coming up with the right excuse — and more about understanding our "why," making choices aligned with our values, and respecting ourselves and others in the process.

ACTIVITY: On the slide, you will see a statement on the left side that is a potential way someone may put pressure on you to use substances. On the right, the statement will be a possible response for refusing the substance by owning your narrative.


SESSION 3: Jeopardy Review, Refusal Skills & How to Help a Friend

- identify warning signs for COD
- refusal skills and owning your narrative
- know when and how to get help

Co-Occurring Disorders	Risk & Protective Factors	Key Takeaways
25	25	25
50	50	50
100	100	100

Skillful & Helpful Coping: Own Your Narrative

- Revisit "What's Important to Me?" (priorities, goals, values)
 - Relationships, school, athletics, etc.
 - Think about how your decisions reflect and support who you are and your best interests
- Practice communication and refusal skills
- Indirect
 - Can keep answers vague but firm
 - Change the subject, seek backup support
 - Repeat the process or leave the situation
- Direct
 - Share your "why" – reason for saying no
 - Remain true to yourself
- Sharing your truth is empowering
 - Models and encourages empathy, breaks stigma
 - Creates safe environment for others to share



Call to Action: Supporting Others

Be nonjudgmental and patient

Create a safe space where your friends feel comfortable to talk openly without fear of criticism

Express concerns in a caring way

Listen actively

Offer emotional and social support

Let your friends know that you care about their well-being and will be there for them by doing check-in's, even if it is just a quick text

Avoid minimizing or downplaying their thoughts, feelings, or experiences

Stay engaged, with love, as long as it's healthy for you

Encourage self-care or enlist an adult

Help your friend find and participate in safe activities that bring them joy and relaxation

If the situation becomes too serious, seek help from a trusted adult



Exit Tickets

Youth Voice

Exit Ticket

Name: _____ Date: _____

I am feeling _____

One question I have is: _____

I am concerned about:
☐ Myself ☐ Someone else ☐ Neither

I would like a check-in:
☐ Immediately ☐ This week
☐ Tomorrow ☐ I'm okay!

- Completed at the end of each session
- Identified students in need of a “check-in”
- Provided a wealth of anecdotal information through questions
 - Why don't more people talk about COD?
 - How do I support a friend who can't talk to their parents?
 - What was the impact on Harris's sister?
 - Thank you for talking about “intergenerational cycles”
 - Why would anyone put fentanyl into drugs?
 - Why is alcohol treated like nothing bad?
 - What can I do to help?

Ensure that identified school supports (School Social Workers) are aware and have access to school or community-based resources

Empowering Teens: Navigating Co-Occurring Disorders for a Resilient Future

Planning Guide:
Continuing the Conversation
in 1, 2, 3...

1 Person in My Circle of Trust

2 Helpful Things I Learned

3 Ways I Can Practice My Learning

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The
Story
Behind The
Stars





The Story Behind the

Mark's poetry demonstrates the depth of his emotions as he struggled with the impact of co-occurring disorders.

Mark's sister was his loved supporter and their love for each other never wavered.

A poem he wrote to her provides the inspiration for the two stars logo to raise Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness.

My little star was glowing

You can read the full poem at theharrisproject.org

Today, the two star logo embodies:

- 1. The power of the human connection
- 2. The benefit of linking to appropriate resources
- 3. The 2 main components of co-occurring disorders: mental health challenges and substance misuse/addiction.

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@theharrisprojectcod
For more information: stephanie@theharrisproject.org





HOW TO HOST A CODA GAME.

RAISE AWARENESS AND BUILD COMMUNITY

Bringing CODA (Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness) to the game is a powerful way to educate the community about the connection between mental health challenges and substance use issues. By hosting a CODA game, you'll help break stigma, spark conversations, and connect people to valuable resources.

Here's how to make it a success in three simple steps.

1 BEFORE THE GAME

Get permission from the school administration and coordinate with sports teams to host a CODA game. Ensure that all necessary approvals are in place.

Coordinate with your Athletic Department and sports teams (e.g. football, basketball, soccer, baseball, softball, lacrosse, track) to ensure their support.

Share the "Story Behind The Stars" and let them know you will provide decals and tattoos for players and coaches to wear during the game. Enlist the help of team captains, if possible.

2 GAME DAY

Distribute decals and tattoos if you haven't already provided them, make sure you have enough for players, coaches, and the opposing team.

Use announcements. Work with the school's public address announcer to share messages before, during, and after the game to engage fans. Suggested field announcements are provided.



Set up an awareness table to provide information, resources, and give-aways for fans related to co-occurring disorders. Consider partnering with other clubs for additional support.

3 INTERACT AND REFLECT

Use social media. When sharing posts, include pictures and stories using #CODAconnects and #BeTheLink hashtags, and tag @theharrisprojectCOD on Instagram. This can help extend the reach of your awareness campaign. Also share to school websites and reach out to local newspapers.

Reflect and plan for the future. Gather feedback after the event. See what worked and what can be improved. Consider hosting CODA athletic games for every sports season.

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PREVENTION THROUGH SPORTS FIELD ANNOUNCEMENTS

Raise awareness about CODA (Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness) with these field announcements, promoting wellness and supporting the health of our athletes, students, and families.

Understanding CODA
Ever heard of CODA? Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness (CODA) is shedding light on the combination of mental health challenges and substance use issues. More than 20 million people have co-occurring disorders, but most have never heard of it. If you set up a table, include: Check out the CODA table to learn more about co-occurring disorders, the CODA 2-star logo on our student athletes, and the story behind the stars.

Mission of the harris project
Did you know? 22% teens in the US have a mental health disorder with severe impact. Things like anxiety, depression, ADHD, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. One in two people with substance use issues also face mental health challenges. The harris project is on a mission to bring co-occurring disorders out of the shadows and into the light.

Pathways to Substance Misuse
Can mental health challenges and sports injuries lead to substance misuse? Yes. They, along with "experimentation" on developing brains under 25 and family history, contribute to Co-Occurring Disorders. CODA empowers informed decisions.


The 2-Star CODA Logo
The 2-star logo you see on our student athletes? It represents the power of human connection, the importance of linking to the right supports, and the two main components of co-occurring disorders: mental health challenges and substance use issues. It's also a reminder that "You Are Not Alone." Use #CODAconnects #BeTheLink to spread the message of connection and support.

The Influence of Substance Use on Mental Health
Did you know that substance use can lead to chemical changes in the developing brain, especially for those 25 and under? Even legal opioid prescriptions for things like sports injuries can contribute to co-occurring disorders.



COD is Preventable and Treatable
The good news? Co-Occurring Disorders is preventable and treatable. Raising awareness is the crucial first step toward saving lives and improving outcomes. Here, you can reach out to Lynnie.guidance@theharrisproject.org or stephanie@theharrisproject.org. Join the CODA Movement and use #CODAconnects #BeTheLink to amplify the message.

Expressing Gratitude
A heartfelt thank you to our Athletic Department, AD, Coaches, Trainers, and, most importantly, our student athletes and community for being an integral part of the CODA Movement. Your support makes a significant impact.

Learn More
Dive deeper into CODA and explore available treatment opportunities by visiting theharrisproject.org or reaching out to stephanie@theharrisproject.org. Knowledge is power, and together, we can make a meaningful difference!



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December 4-5, 2025


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Impact on Staff

- Classroom disruption** - struggling students cause disruptions, impacting the learning environment and requiring additional time and management
- Frustration/feeling helpless** - staff may feel frustrated or helpless when they lack the resources or training to support students with COD effectively
- Strain/burnout** - supporting students with COD can lead to stress or emotional strain and increase the risk of burnout over time

What Is Your Role? Important and Limited


- Recognize warnings signs**
Be observant and notice any significant changes in a student's baseline (mood, behavior, appearance, grades, social circle, attendance, etc.)
- Outreach/engagement**
Engage the student to gather more information in order to make the most effective and appropriate referral
- Make a referral**
Always follow your school or organization's chain of command to determine appropriate next steps for getting help or support for the student
- Follow-up/check-in**
Continue to show support and care even after the referral is made while staying genuine to your relationship



Please remember to adhere to your state's mandated reporting guidelines and report any concerns promptly



Parent/Caregiver Curriculum




What About Hosting?

Allowing teens to drink/use substances in the home normalizes use and can open the door to Co-Occurring Disorders.
It is not protective to "teach your child to use responsibly at home".

Prioritize	Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting youth mental health and safeguarding brain development• Providing a fun, healthy environment for your children and their friends• Setting a positive example and modeling helpful coping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing alcohol or other substances to underage youth• "It is against the law and you may be liable for any resulting harm or damage"

1-hour parent/caregiver session

- Understanding COD & Three Pathways
- Recognizing Signs and Symptoms
- Risk & Protective Factors and the Role of Caring Adults
- Targeted Tips and Tools for Parents/Caregivers
- Resources and Treatment Options - Importance of Integrated Care



Breaking Intergenerational Cycles: A New Path for Our Families

- We Weren't Taught, But Now We Know**
Previous generations may not have understood how mental health and substance use fuel each other.
- Early Intervention Can Improve Outcomes**
By recognizing the signs early and seeking help, we can stop history from repeating itself. Education is key to a new, healthier family legacy.
- Take Action Now**
Learn and talk about mental health and substance use with your loved ones. Be proactive in seeking support when needed.
- You have the power to change your family's future.**

Potential Warning Signs of COD: What might these look like in the home?

- Family or personal history of mental health and/or substance use disorders
- Avoiding friends and family
- Struggling to focus, finish tasks, or make decisions
- Using substances when alone
- Changes in physical health (weight, hygiene, appearance, sleeping and eating habits)
- Extreme mood swings or bursts of energy
- Loss of interest in hobbies, school, or responsibilities
- Impulsive, risky behaviors
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts

What Can We Do?


- **Learn** about co-occurring disorders
- **Model** healthy attitudes, coping skills, behaviors, and help seeking
- Have check-in **conversations** with students
- Try to encourage **delaying** substance use for as long as possible
- Know a child's level of risk and **intervene early** if there are signs of a mental health challenge or substance use issue
- Involve **families** when appropriate or needed
- Be a **trusted adult** to the students you work with: [#CODAconnects](#) [#BeTheLink](#)



Integrated Care is the best treatment for someone with **Co-Occurring Disorders**

- Treats both mental health and substance use disorders within one program
- Care delivered by a single clinician or team well trained in both disorders and their co-occurrence
- A coordinated approach that provides comprehensive, person-centered care


Feasibility Study




Train – the –Trainer!


- Health & Physical Education Professionals
- School Social Workers
- Prevention Specialists
- Youth Serving Community Organizations
- Faith Youth Leadership

3-hour training
3 session Learning Collaborative





Training Institute in collaboration with Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES






Replicating Success



Scaling the Westchester model:


- Step-by-step guidance for other communities, counties, states
- Sharing tools and resources, including curricula templates
- Establishing training and technical support opportunities with interested groups
 - prevention specialists, health & physical education, etc.



Call to action


Bridging the Gaps

Enhancing Behavioral Health Treatment and Support for Tennesseans



tamho
tennessee association of
mental health organizations

- **Start the conversation early.** Normalize discussions about mental health and substance use together.
- **Build connections.** Emphasize the importance of helping students identify trusted adults and promote help-seeking.
- **Explore integration.** Introduce the COD Curriculum to your administration as a tool to strengthen prevention and early intervention.
- **Engage families and schools.** Encourage participation in COD prevention and awareness efforts. Take opportunities to infuse messaging.
- **Promote best practices.** Share the value of integrated care with local providers so that co-occurring needs can be addressed together.



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Questions & Answers

Please raise your hand if you'd like to ask a question or share a comment.

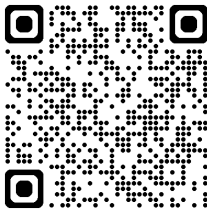
A Mic Runner will bring a wireless handheld microphone to you. Kindly speak directly into the mic so that everyone can hear you clearly.

COMPLETE CONFERENCE EVALUATION FORMS AND THE REQUEST FOR DOCUMENTATION OF CEs EARNED

Up to 5.75 CE units or contact / clock
hours available for this event.

QUESTIONS?
Email: tamho@tamho.org

EVALUATIONS



REQUEST FOR CE DOCUMENTATION

