

PARENT

NEWSLETTER



01 NEW YOUTH COALITION

Shepherd University's newly formed Drug-Free^{WV} Student Coalition is hitting the ground running!

02 MEET EMILY, MADI, & JESSICA

School Support Specialists are making a difference in our schools.

03 COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Partnering up in Charles Town to give back to the community.

04 EMPOWERING CHANGE AND HOPE

MuHS Drug Free WV Youth Coalition: Looking Ahead.

05 SIGNS YOUR KID HAS SCREEN ADDICTION *(And What To Do About It)*





Check out Shepherd University's New Youth Coalition!



TMI STAFF

Shepherd University's newly formed Drug-Free^{WV} Student Coalition, led by faculty advisor Albina Laskovtsov, is hitting the ground running! Focused on educating, preventing, and reducing stigma around substance use, this student-led group promotes personal and community well-being.

Drug-Free^{WV}

A Coalition For Our Community

They recently hosted a tabling event at the Rams Den, engaging students on the importance of stigma-free language around substance use. The student-led group is dedicated to educating, preventing, and reducing stigma, promoting both personal and community well-being. Attendees learned how bias-free language and understanding substance use can make a real difference in creating a supportive campus environment. The Youth Coalition is excited to continue its mission and welcomes students to join the coalition and be part of positive change.

It's truly empowering to see youth taking the lead in promoting stigma-free conversations and substance use prevention. Their initiative and passion show that students can drive meaningful change in their communities.



MEET EMILY

School Support Specialist

My name is Emily Hawver, and I am the School Support Specialist at Berkeley Heights Elementary School. I work with the children one-on-one and in small groups, as well as provide crisis intervention for other students when I am able. I am also teaching Too Good For Drugs in all 19 classrooms.

We have about 500 kids in the school and teaching Too Good For Drugs in the classrooms has helped me to build rapport and relationships with students I might not get a chance to get to know otherwise, as well as build a stronger bond with the students already on my caseload. The kids from last year remembered me teaching and the puppet I brought to each class. I have also found that students approach me more out in the community when I am currently teaching in their classrooms, which has also allowed me to build relationships with parents of students not on my caseload.

This school year, I am working with the social committee on school social events alongside several other staff members to engage more families in the school and build a stronger sense of community. I am also working hands-on with families to provide support inside and outside of the school. I am looking forward to the rest of the school year and the challenges and successes it will bring.

BY EMILY HAWVER



MEET MADI

School Support Specialist

My name is Madison Barrow, and I have been the School Support Specialist at Tuscarora Elementary and the C.A.R.E.S. Academy for the past three years. I have made many connections with children throughout my time here, and I have been able to watch my kids use all the skills I have taught them. I work with many children who struggle with behavioral issues at the C.A.R.E.S. Academy, and this has been very rewarding.



One child specifically struggled at his home school and was aggressive with many staff members and classmates. He came to the C.A.R.E.S. Academy, did amazingly well, and was able to return to his home school. I got a call from his mom, who told me I was invited to an Awards Ceremony at his school because he was getting an award for best behavior in his class. It was so bittersweet to see a child make so much progress and succeed.

With the holidays coming up, Tuscarora wants to make some children's holidays a little more special. With the help of our school counselor, we have been able to get 12 parents, staff, and community members to sponsor families that need extra help with the holidays. We are eager to get these gifts to the families and hear all about the gifts the children received.

BY MADISON BARROW



BY TMI STAFF

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT:

GIVING BACK IN CHARLES TOWN

Misty Waits, Police Support Specialist at the Charles Town Police Department, recently partnered with The Anthology Church to support the local homeless community.



The church's youth group thoughtfully prepared 48 backpacks filled with essential items and personally delivered them to Misty. Pictured are Pastor Curtis, Youth Group Leader Michelle, her daughter Kendall, and Misty with the backpacks, an inspiring example of young people taking the lead to make a real difference in their community. Their efforts highlight the power of collaboration and compassion in addressing local needs.

BY JESSICA MICHAEL



MEET JESSICA

School Support Specialist

My name is Jessica Michael, and this is my fourth year as The Martinsburg Initiative School Support Specialist at Martinsburg High School. This is a special year for me, as I have four seniors on my caseload, and I have had the privilege of working with them since they were freshmen. I have seen tremendous maturity and growth in these four students over the last four years.

Being a social worker in a school, especially one as diverse as Martinsburg High School, brings a mix of challenges and rewards, supporting students not only with academic concerns but also with emotional, social, and family issues that shape their lives. Over the last four years, I have been a listener, an advocate, and a trusted adult for many of my students. It will be exceptional for me this year to watch these four students walk across the stage and receive their diplomas, knowing I had a small part in their success.

Looking back over the last four years with each of these students, I am reminded of many meetings that involved both laughter and tears. There have been many sessions promoting mental health, teaching coping skills, collaborating on behavior plans, and ultimately encouraging these students to think and dream beyond the present. It has been an honor to watch these students grow, to feel seen and supported, and to know they are capable of success.

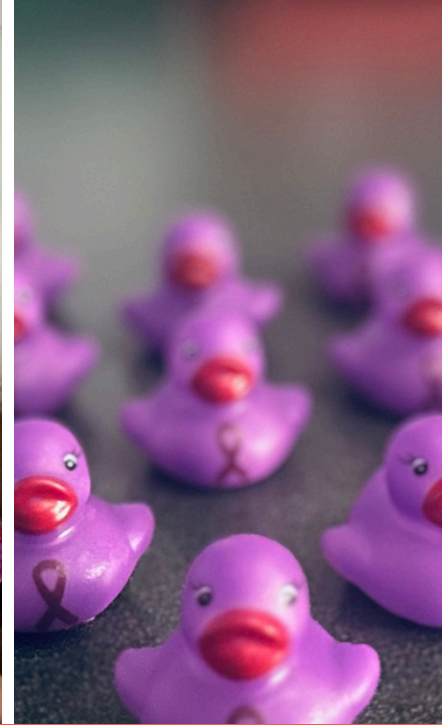
“Each day is challenging, and each year brings new obstacles, but I know the work I do within the school walls is meaningful.”

Just last month, I was pleasantly surprised when a student who graduated 2 years ago (2024) came to visit me; he is now in his sophomore year of college. I had only met this student during his senior year, but he was dealing with some problems at home and in his personal relationships. He wanted to let me know how he was doing in school and the impact that I had on him during his senior year.

The student said he often hears my voice in his head, encouraging him when he wants to quit. His words were so motivating to me, reminding me that my role here at Martinsburg not only shapes the school culture and climate, but also the futures of the students I serve, one conversation and one connection at a time.

MEET JESSICA

School Support Specialist



Drug-Free^{WV}

A Coalition For Our Community

BY DIANA ANTHONY

MUHS DRUG FREE WV
YOUTH COALITION:

EMPOWERING CHANGE AND HOPE

The MuHS Drug Free^{WV} Youth Coalition continues to make an incredible impact within our school and community.

As the coalition's advisor, I am honored to work alongside such passionate and dedicated youth who are committed to having meaningful conversations about mental health, vaping and tobacco use, substance use, and stigma—while serving as positive role models for their peers and younger generations.

One coalition member shared, "Being part of our youth coalition showed me that my voice actually matters and that I can help create real change in our school." Their words reflect the heart of this group and the influence they're having every day.



FALL SEMESTER HIGHLIGHTS



Our coalition members had a busy and rewarding fall semester, participating in a variety of impactful events and service projects:

OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

Students encouraged staff and classmates to wear purple, created awareness ribbons, shared overdose statistics, distributed informational resources, and “ducked” the student body with purple ribbon ducks to promote awareness and remembrance.

SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

(September) – Sponsored a Wall of Hope in the cafeteria where students shared messages of encouragement and learned about available mental health resources.

TRUNK OR TREAT

Sponsored four trunks at The Martinsburg Initiative’s annual Trunk or Treat, providing a safe and fun community engagement opportunity.

WORLD KINDNESS DAY

Spread positivity by leaving kind and uplifting notes on car windshields throughout the school parking lot.

INTERNATIONAL SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE LOSS DAY

Sponsored a memorial table and memory box in the cafeteria and coordinated a moment of silence during morning announcements.

HOLIDAY GIVING

Sponsored a Christmas family by raising funds, shopping, and wrapping gifts. Members also volunteered at the Joys & Toys community event, helping unload, organize, and distribute donated items to local families.



LOOKING AHEAD

As we move into the spring semester, coalition members are leading the I PROMise Campaign to promote safe and responsible decision-making during prom season. They are also organizing the annual Penny Wars fundraiser, with all proceeds benefiting a local agency that supports community needs. ❤️

The coalition continues to collaborate and develop innovative approaches to expand outreach within both the school and the wider community. Our youth continue to demonstrate exceptional leadership, insight, and compassion—using their voices to inspire meaningful change. The MuHS Drug Free ^{WV} Youth Coalition remains steadfast in its mission to empower students and help build a healthier, stronger future for our school and community.

SPEAK UP. **STAY SAFE.**

ever feel
UNSAFE
at **SCHOOL**



A MESSAGE BROUGHT TO YOU BY

Drug-Free^{WV}

A Coalition For Our Community

Learn more at themartinsburginitiative.com





BY BETH ANN MAYER, PARENTS.COM

7 SIGNS YOUR KID HAS SCREEN ADDICTION

(AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT)

Experts say kids can have screen addiction and even withdrawal symptoms. The good news is they can combat it fairly quickly.

At this point, discussing the relationship kids and teens have with screens feels passé. You may have mentally muted those notifications—and experts get it. But they say it's essential for parents to keep tuning in to the crisis and their kids' behavior around screens.

"While we've yet to fully realize the downstream effects of this new digitized dynamic, the available data overwhelmingly points to a corrosive effect on our children's mental health and well-being," says Kellyn Smythe, MS, an admissions director for Pacific Quest, a residential treatment facility helping adolescents recover from social media and screen addiction.

*The average teen spends nearly five hours per day on social media.**

*According to a 2023 Gallup Poll

And a study from the same year suggests that habitually checking social media in early adolescence could change the brain's sensitivity to rewards and punishments. Of course, younger kids are also using screens. A 2025 survey from the Pew Research Center found that the majority of parents say their kids ages 5 to 7 and ages 2 to 4 use smartphones.

But recent research shows that screen addiction may be more important to pay attention to than screen time itself. A big reason is that those who feel addicted to their devices are more at risk for mental health issues.

Smythe has been at the forefront of this crisis. He and mental health providers discuss the signs of screen addiction and withdrawal, plus how to help your kid or teen foster a healthier relationship with their devices.

What Is Screen Addiction?

"Simply put, if your child, with any regularity, chooses screen time over in-person experiences—and seemingly can't prevent themselves from doing so—it's fair to deem them 'screen-addicted,'" Smythe says.



Screens include smartphones, tablets, computers, and TVs. Addiction can happen because of the stimulation people get from using tech. Data shows social media, for example, triggers surges in dopamine, a neurotransmitter known as the "feel good" chemical connected to our reward-seeking behaviors.

"Individuals afflicted with screen addiction continue to gradually immerse themselves in screen time to a point where it exceeds their ability to control it," explains [Matt Glowiak, PhD, LCPC, CAADC](#), chief addiction specialist with [Recovered.org](#), an organization that provides resources for mental health and addiction treatment. "They spend more time on the screen than intended or desired, even to the detriment of everything else in their lives. When not on the screen, their thoughts and emotions are nearly absent in the real-life setting while obsessing about their next use."

It can be harder for kids and teens to pump the brakes than adults.

"While many adults might eventually recognize problematic use but struggle to stop, with children and adolescents, considering their developmental level, problematic use is oftentimes out of their awareness," explains Dr. Glowiak. "It becomes the 'new norm.'"



Signs Your Kid May Have Screen Addiction

When parents understand the signs of screen addiction, they can intervene. When it comes to teens, Smythe encourages parents to look out for those who:

- *Habitually avoid in-person experiences, like hangouts with friends, sports, and family events, in favor of screen time.*
- *Show irritability or have outbursts around screen time boundaries.*
- *Attempt to or use screens as an emotional regulation tool.*
- *Miss school*
- *Exhibit signs of anxiety or depression*
- *Experience changes weight, well-being, or activity.*
- *Avoid typical social milestones, such as attending school dances, sleepovers, family vacations, and dates.*

For younger kids, parents may also notice an intense preoccupation with screens, a loss of interest in other activities, frustration when they can't use screens, and difficulty in stopping them from using them. Plus, the amount of screen time a kid wants may keep increasing.

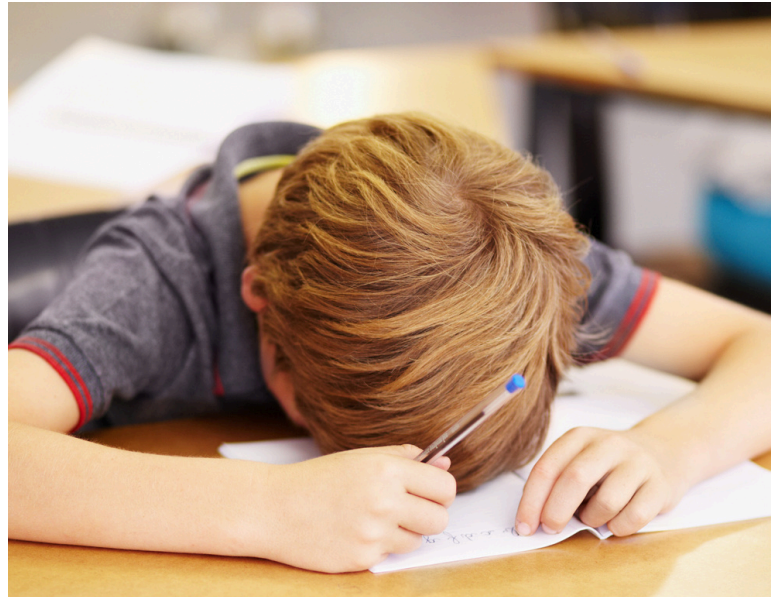
Screen Withdrawal Can Come After Addiction

If you notice your kid struggling and then try to limit the amount of screen time, you may encounter another issue. Since screen and social media addictions follow similar patterns to substance use, experts share that kids and teens might experience a withdrawal period.

Stefanie Mazer, PsyD, a psychologist in Palm Beach, Florida, says that those with screen withdrawal may experience:

- *Anxiety*
- *Restlessness*
- *Boredom*
- *Fear of missing out*
- *Constant thoughts of checking accounts or screens*
- *Moodiness*
- *Irritability*
- *Physical symptoms, like trouble sleeping or headaches*

Smythe also notices teens experience a phenomenon called "phantom phone syndrome," in which they repeatedly check their pockets for smartphones that they know are not there.



"Remarkably quickly, we see the positive outcomes of a break from social media and screens," Smythe says. "These improvements include improved sleep and energy levels, reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms, an increase in creativity, and—perhaps most importantly on the journey away from screen addiction—a healthier social appetite and engagement in pro-social activities,"

How To Help Your Kid Prevent or Navigate Screen Addiction

When it comes to screens, it can feel like the train has left the station, and we'll never catch up.

"My most urgent piece of advice for parents is to take the power back," Smythe says. "It may sometimes seem like you don't have a choice in the matter, but you do."

Experts share empowering tips on how to do that.

Collaborate on screen rules.

Dr. Mazer suggests parents work with kids and teens to create straightforward rules that make sense for them.

"Decide together when your child can be on their phone or tablet," Dr. Mazer says. "Keep it realistic, meaning don't try to cut it down too much at once or limit it all altogether. You can put timers on devices if that helps."

When crafting these rules, it can be helpful to be intentional as a family about the rules you'll all follow, such as device-free dinners.

Show kids that there's a life beyond screens.

This one even includes TV. "While the hustle and bustle of life leaves many people exhausted and reaching for the remote, this is where one may consider alternative activities," Dr. Glowiak says. "Going to the park, taking a walk, being part of a sports team, visiting the library, hiking in the woods, and so many other activities can engage our children on many levels that not only distance them from the screen but also enhance their abilities and interests elsewhere."

Seek support when needed.

Dr. Mazer advises parents to look out for symptoms of screen addiction and withdrawal, such as mood changes or fatigue, when away from screens. If your kid is struggling, there's no shame in getting extra support. "Take to a pediatrician, counselor, or therapist," Dr. Mazer suggests.



Embrace boredom.

Or? Your kid may find a trip to the park (or non-structured, screen-free time, more generally) "so boring." Smythe says boredom isn't a bad thing, though.

"Boredom is an essential part of childhood development, and it is in your child's interest to experience boredom on a regular basis," he says. "Unstructured time is the foundation for creativity, problem-solving, emotional resilience, and the development of executive function. Make a point to have more unstructured time every day than screen time."

Set an example.

Dr. Glowiak concedes that this one can be challenging. Kids and teens aren't the only ones who default to screen time. But he encourages parents to role-model healthy screen habits.

"It is important for parents to avoid their own urges with screen time, such as continually checking their phones in the presence of their children," Dr. Glowiak says. "This also includes being intentional with time at work, thereby setting boundaries around when parents will check their work computers, especially after hours. Remember, not everything is an emergency, though it might feel like one."

EVERY CHILD DESERVES A GOOD START

If you have an Infant or toddler at home and have concerns about their development with moving, talking, hearing, vision, playing, learning, or growing, we are here to help.

West Virginia's Infant and Toddler Early Intervention Program. Telehealth and In Person appointments are available at NO COST TO YOU.

(304) 267-3595 ext 132





Get the facts about electronic cigarettes, their health effects and the risks of using e-cigarettes.

E-cigarettes (also called “vapes”) have been the most commonly used tobacco product among U.S. youth since 2014. Educators can make a real difference by engaging in meaningful conversations with their students about the dangers of vaping for young people and ways to quit.

CDC launched the Empower Vape-Free Youth™ campaign in 2023 to encourage middle and high school educators to speak with students about the risks of e-cigarettes and nicotine addiction. The campaign also provides resources for educators to help students avoid or quit vaping.

EMPOWER
Vape-Free
YOUTH™



Info Provided by the Center for
Disease Control and Prevention



i talk
they hear you®



START TALKING BEFORE SHE HEADS OFF TO SCHOOL.

It's never too early to have a conversation about alcohol and other drugs.

The sooner you talk about the dangers of underage drinking and substance use, the greater chance you have of influencing your child's decisions about using alcohol and other drugs. For tips on how—and when—to begin the conversation, visit

www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov

#TalkTheyHearYou

PEP20-03-01-041



SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



A MODEL SOLUTION

TO A NATIONAL PROBLEM

Our mission is to prevent substance use disorders, build strong families, and empower the Martinsburg community through police, school, community, health, and education partnerships.

1

Increase awareness

of how to prevent substance use disorder through community empowerment.

2

Mitigate negative consequences

Resulting from substance misuse or trauma through community interventions, medication overdose.

3

Identify, risk stratify and offer appropriate interventions

for individuals experiencing risk factors of trauma or substance misuse.

4

Evaluate and report performance.



THE
MARTINSBURG
INITIATIVE

A POLICE, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP