ECHO IDAHO

K12 Youth Well-being & Upstream Prevention

The Context of Youth Well-Being and Upstream Prevention in Idaho

10-9-2026

Megan Smith, PhD, Boise State University School of Public & Population Health and Communities for Youth

None of the planners or presenters for this educational activity have relevant financial relationship(s) to disclose with ineligible companies whose primary business is producing, marketing, selling, re-selling, or distributing healthcare products used by or on patients.

University of Idaho
School of Health and Medical Professions

Project ECHO

Learning Objectives

- Describe what is known about adolescent development in relation to youth mental health and well-being.
- Articulate the current context of youth mental health and well-being in Idaho.
- Define Upstream Prevention and give examples.

Adolescence

“In order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults … Somebody’s got to be crazy about that kid. That’s number one.”

— Urie Bronfenbrenner

Development happens in context:
Family-Community-Culture/Subculture-Policies-Environment

Adolescence in Context

Distinct developmental stage– Known as the second most important attachment phase in development

Rapid brain, body, and identity changes

Mental Health vulnerabilities

Development is shaped by systems, not just individual choices or biology. All stages are dependent upon the systems that shape them

Core Developmental Tasks

Brain Development: Prefrontal Cortex matures late; emotional/reward systems peak early.

Identify formation: Race, gender, sexuality, values

Autonomy & Connection: Push for independence AND need for adult scaffolding/structure

Onset of conditions: 75% of mental health diagnoses emerge before the age of 25

Family System



Protective Factors: Secure attachment, warm monitoring, open communications

Risks: Caregiver mental health, poverty, family conflict

Trauma Load (ACES): emotional abuse, neglect, household struggles equate to higher adolescent risk

Idaho context: Access to mental health support and access to mental health support independent of family can be a barrier

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/su/su7304a5.htm?utm

School & Peer Systems



School Climate: Fair discipline, inclusive culture= protective; zero tolerance & bullying = harmful

Disparities: Racialized discipline– Black indigenous, Latinx youth face disproportionate suspensions/expulsions

Peers: Belonging protects; rejection isolates; peer influence magnified by social media

https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-exclusionary-school-discipline.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com%20%22Exclusionary%20discipline%20practices%20in%20public%20schools,%202017-%20...%22

Community, Media & Structural Systems

Community: Sports, faith groups, youth programs offer belonging; resource deserts increase risk

Media/Tech: Community, identify exploration vs cyber bullying, comparison, sleep disruption

Policy Systems:

Medicaid Expansion: Access to care varies

Minor consent/confidentiality rules vary; shapes help seeking

Education policies affect knowledge and stigma

Idaho Context: High suicide burden + workforce shortage (more coming on this)



Race, Racism, & Development



Racialized stress= higher depression, anxiety

Discipline disparities reinforce inequity

Cultural Strengths: racial socialization, affirmation of heritage, community mentors buffer against harm

Trauma and teens

Adolescence is a sensitive period: the highly plastic brain is impacted by systemic & individual stress.

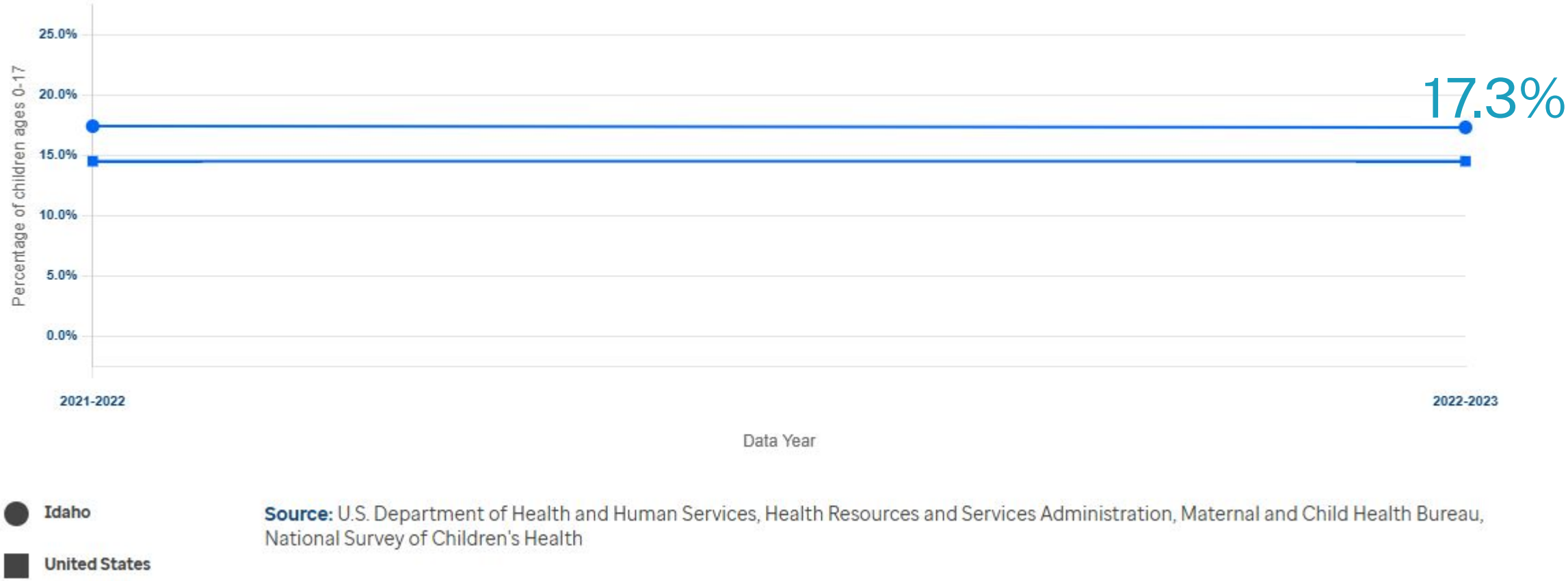
Trauma exposures impact the adolescent brain: violence, poverty, discrimination, substance abuse, family instability, natural disasters

Trauma changes the brain, alters pathways for threat detection, alarm centers, attention, & regulation

Hopeful side: predictable, safe, and culturally affirming environments re-calibrate stress response.

Youth Well-being in Idaho: ACEs

Idaho's children reporting 2 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), continue to outpace the nation.



University of Idaho School of Health and Medical Professions

Project ECHO

Youth Well-being in Idaho: Mental Health

#50

National Ranking

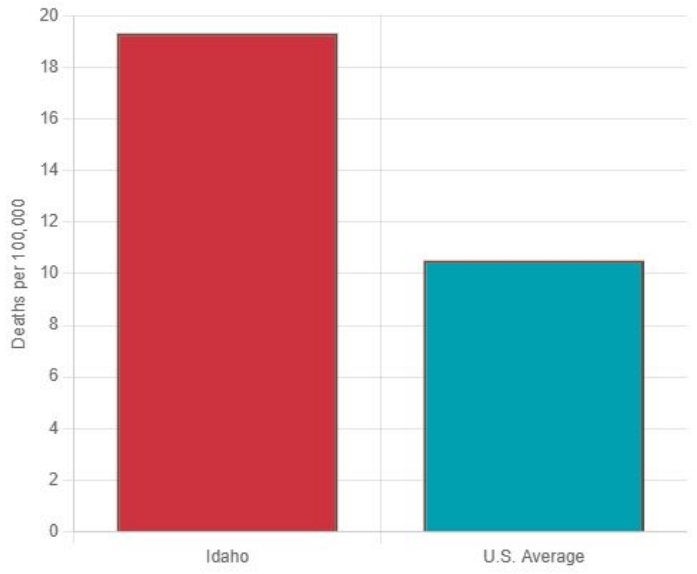
Idaho ranked 50th in the nation for youth mental health in 2022, indicating a severe crisis with high prevalence of mental illness and low rates of access to care.

1.8x

Higher Suicide Rate

Teen Suicide Rates (per 100,000)

Idaho's rate of death by suicide among teens aged 15-19 is alarmingly high compared to the national average. This disparity underscores a critical public health issue within the state that demands immediate and focused attention.

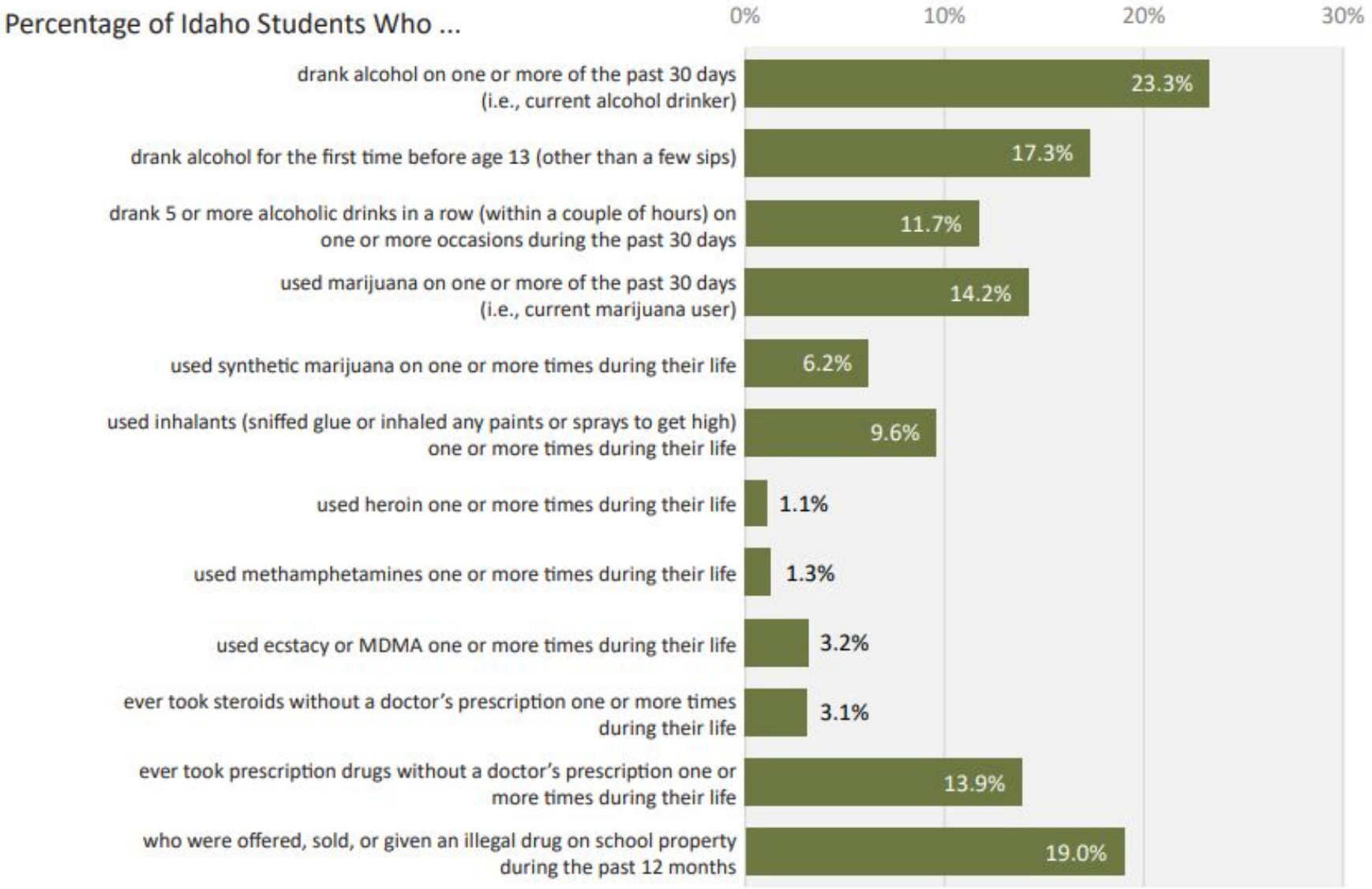


52.5% of youth in need of mental health services go untreated each year.

University of Idaho
School of Health and Medical Professions

Project ECHO

Youth Well-being in Idaho: Substance Use



	Idaho	US
Alcohol	23.3%	22.7%
Marijuana	14.2%	15.8%

University of Idaho
School of Health and Medical Professions

Project ECHO

Rates in Idaho-Youth Mental Health: Depression (2023)

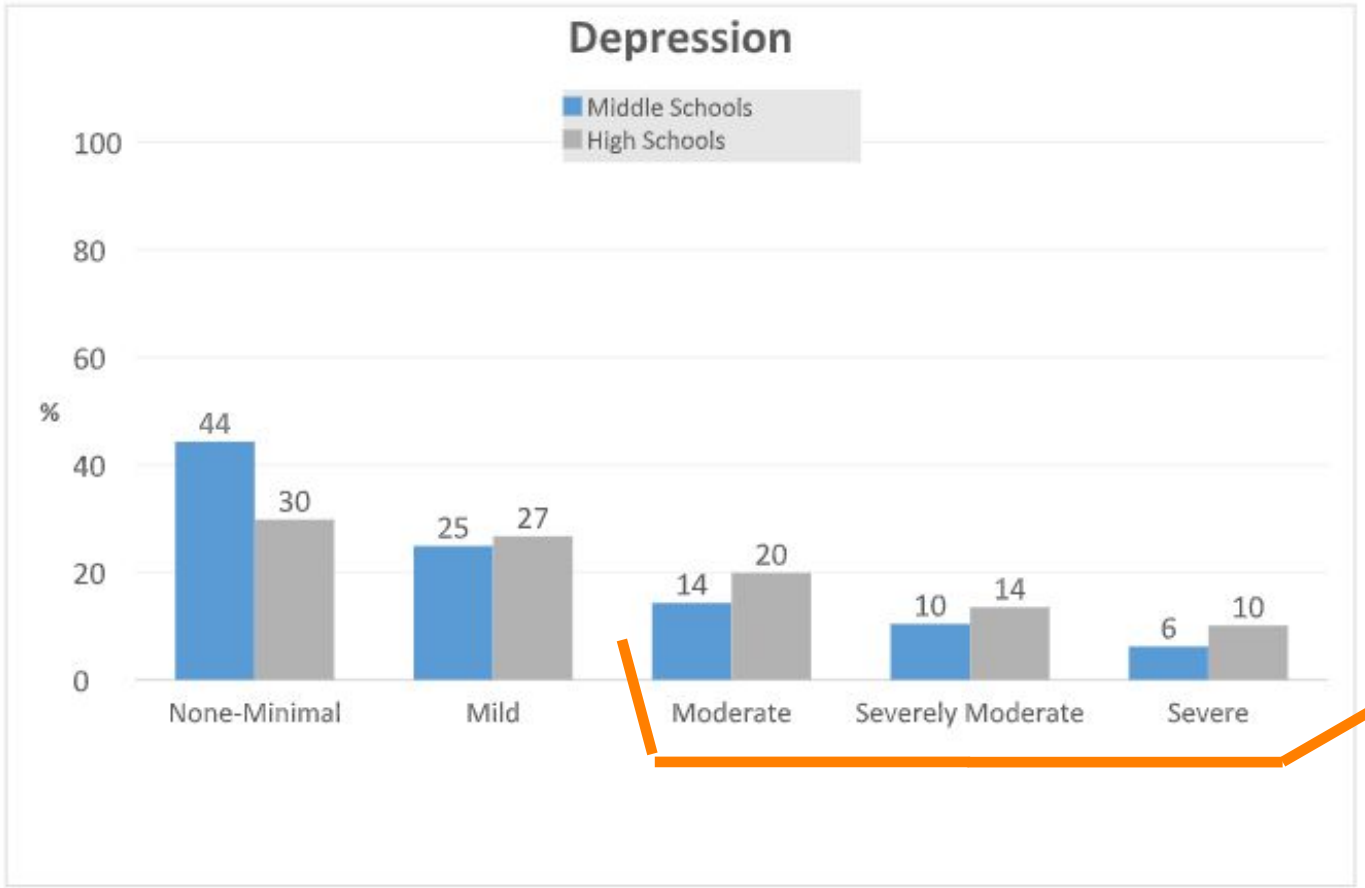


Figure 1. PHQ-9 Clinical Depression Scale. *Over the last 2 weeks, 44% of middle school students reported experiencing depressive symptoms in the range of none-minimal, 25% reported mild, 14% reported moderate, 10% reported severely moderate, and 6% reported severe. 30% of high school students reported experiencing depressive symptoms in the range of none-minimal, 27% reported mild, 20% reported moderate, 14% reported severely moderate, and 10% reported severe.*

Middle School: 30%

High School: 44%

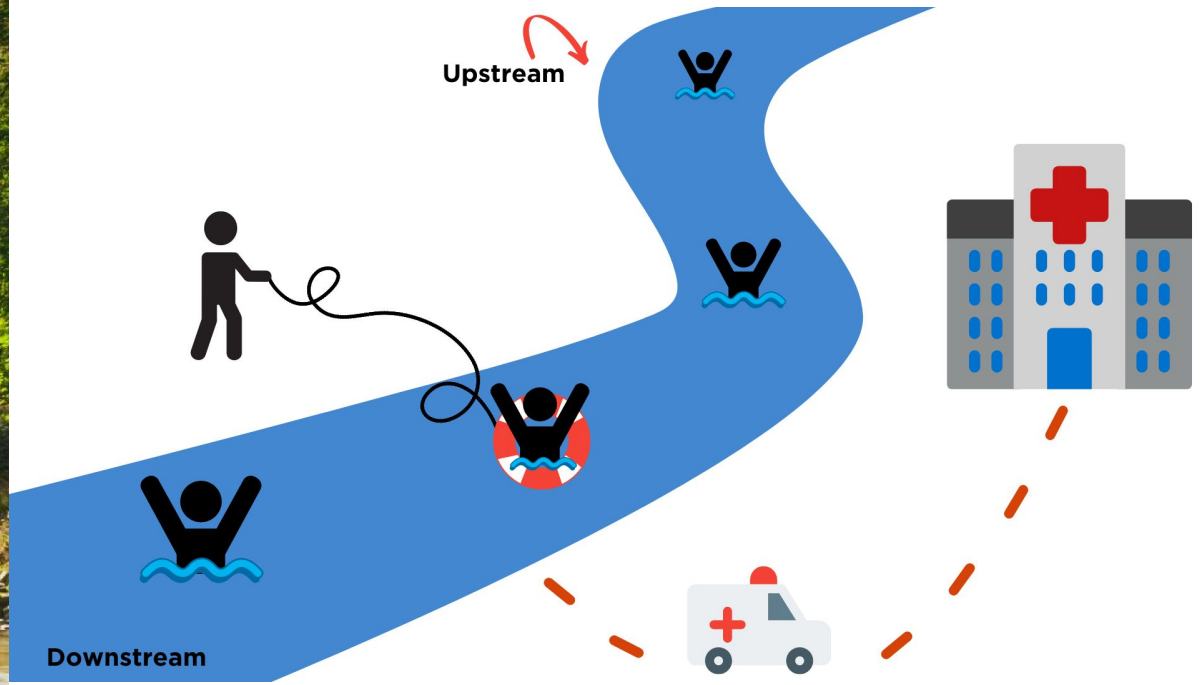
Health Impact Pyramid



Our goal is to promote the most well-being for the most people.

“UPSTREAM PREVENTION”: A Parable





University of Idaho
School of Health and Medical Professions

Project ECHO

UPSTREAM PREVENTION



- Focus on root causes instead of waiting for crisis to occur.
- Focus on the whole context/environment not just individual behavior.
- Focus on increasing *protective factors* and reducing *risk factors* at the community level.

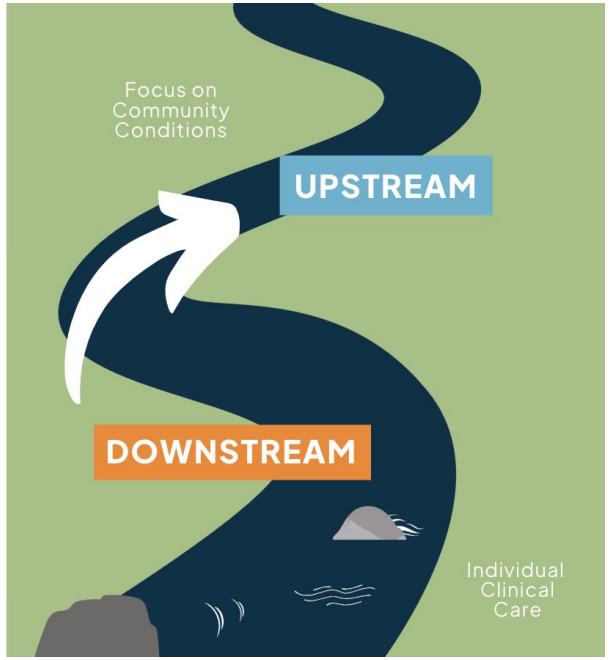
University of Idaho
School of Health and Medical Professions

Project ECHO

Moving Upstream for Youth Well-being

Downstream Actions
(Reactive)

- **Crisis Response:** *Emergency room visits, crisis hotlines & planning.*
- **Treatment for Severe Illness:** *addressing acute mental illness or substance use disorders.*
- **Disciplinary Systems:** *juvenile justice or school expulsion.*



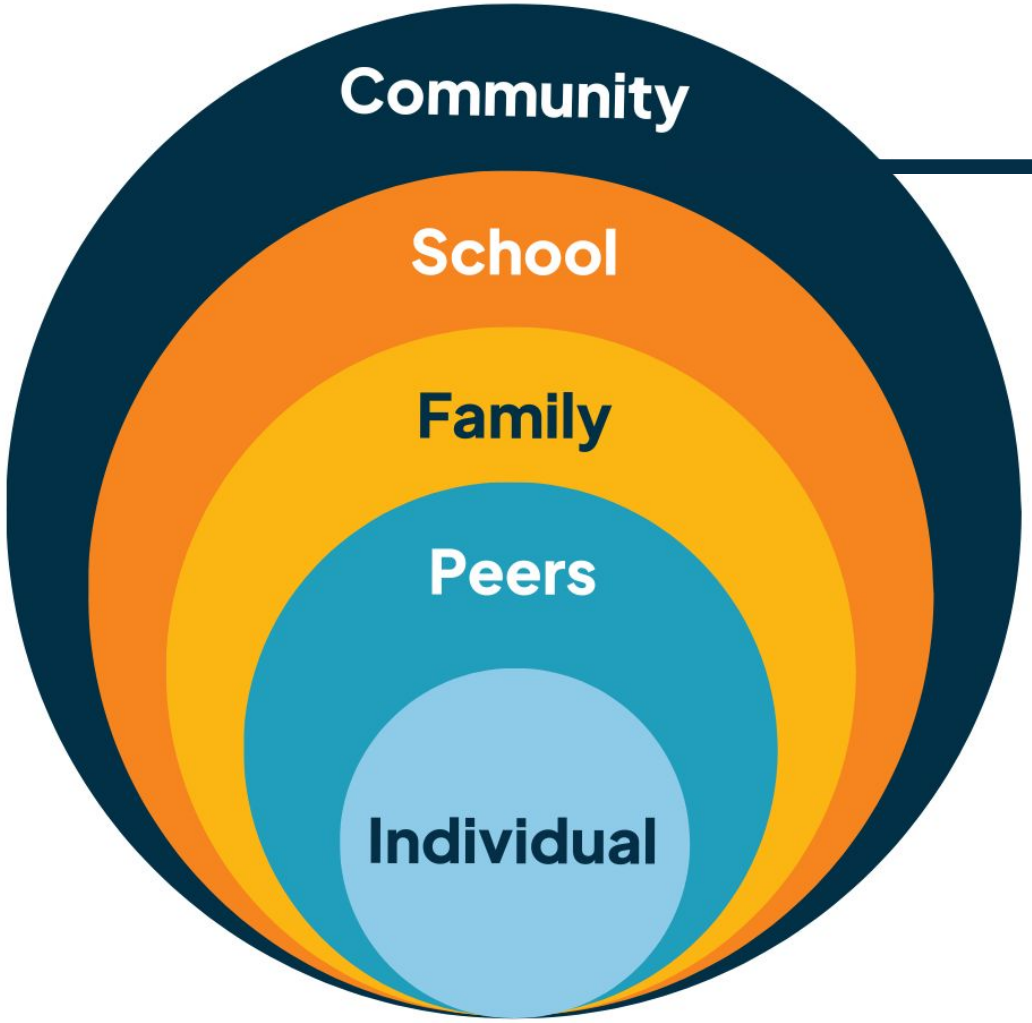
Upstream Prevention
(Proactive)

- **Building Protective Factors:** *fostering strong family, school, and community connections.*
- **Skill-Building:** *teaching skills like empathy, coping strategies, and social health/relationships.*
- **Reducing Risk Factors:** *community efforts that reduce exposure to trauma and violence.*
- **Promoting Positive Activities:** *access to sports, arts, mentoring and programs for all youth.*

University of Idaho
School of Health and Medical Professions

Project ECHO

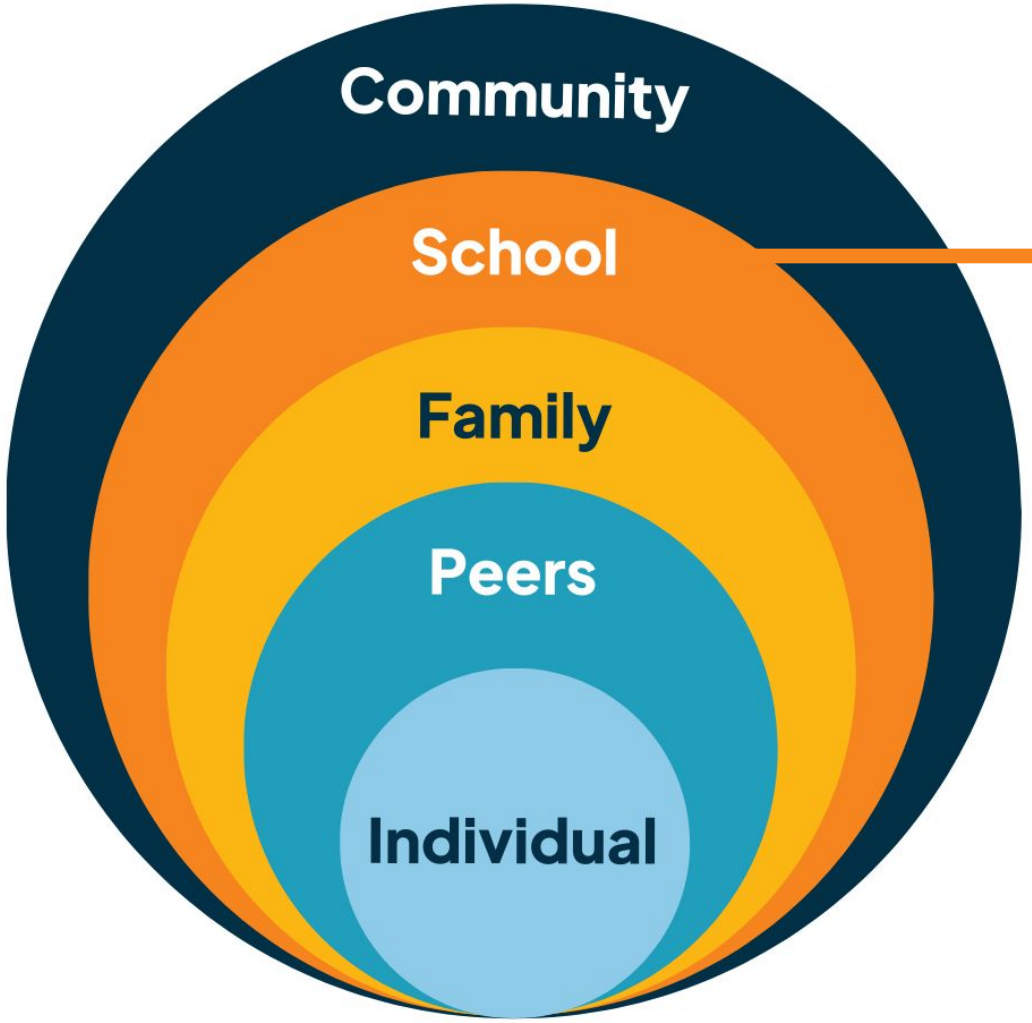
Risk & Protective Factors



Community Protective Factor:

Existence of safe and welcoming spaces for teens outside of home and school (third places)

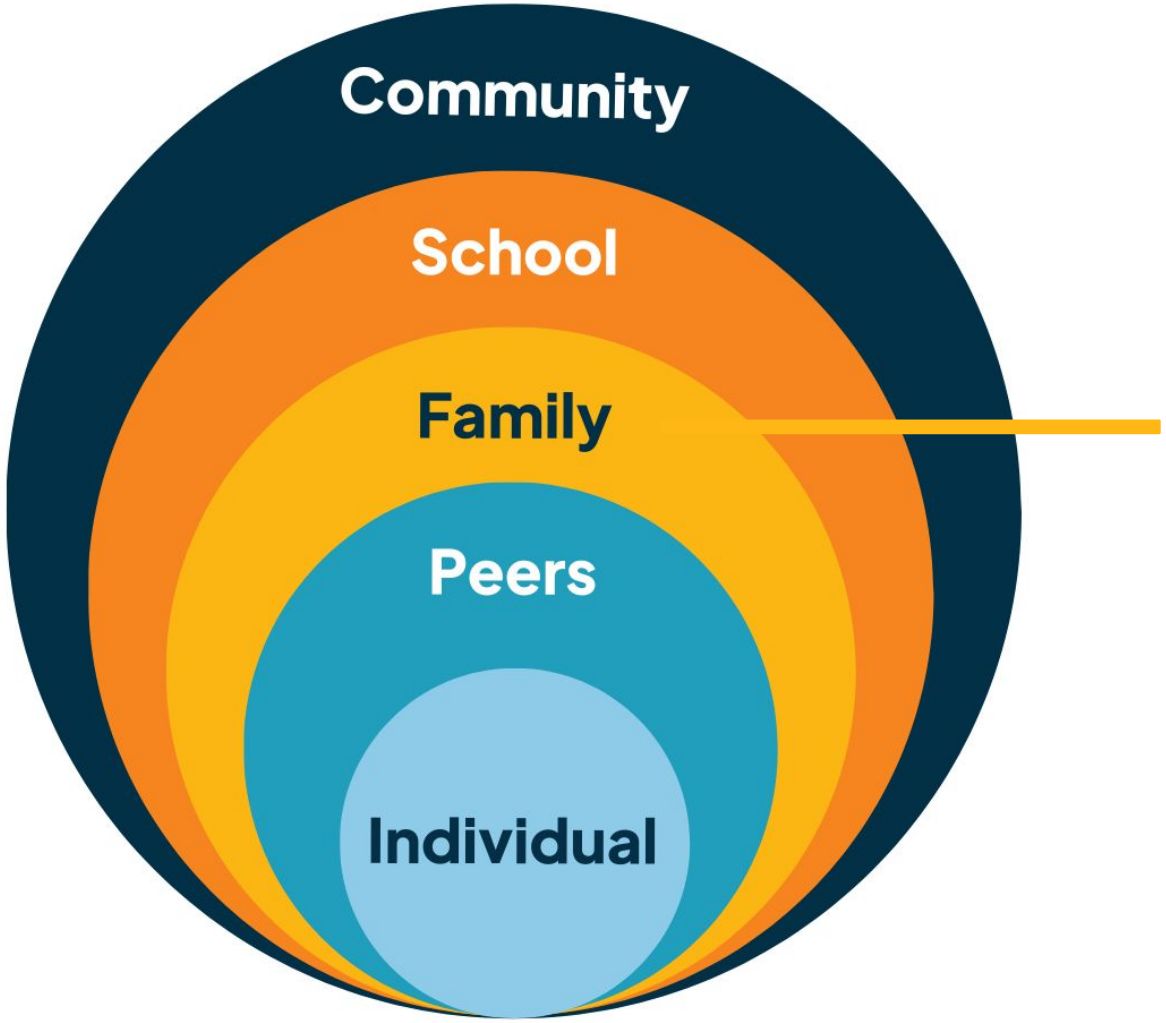
Risk & Protective Factors



School Protective Factor:

Supportive relationships with adults and peers at school and a desire to learn and grow

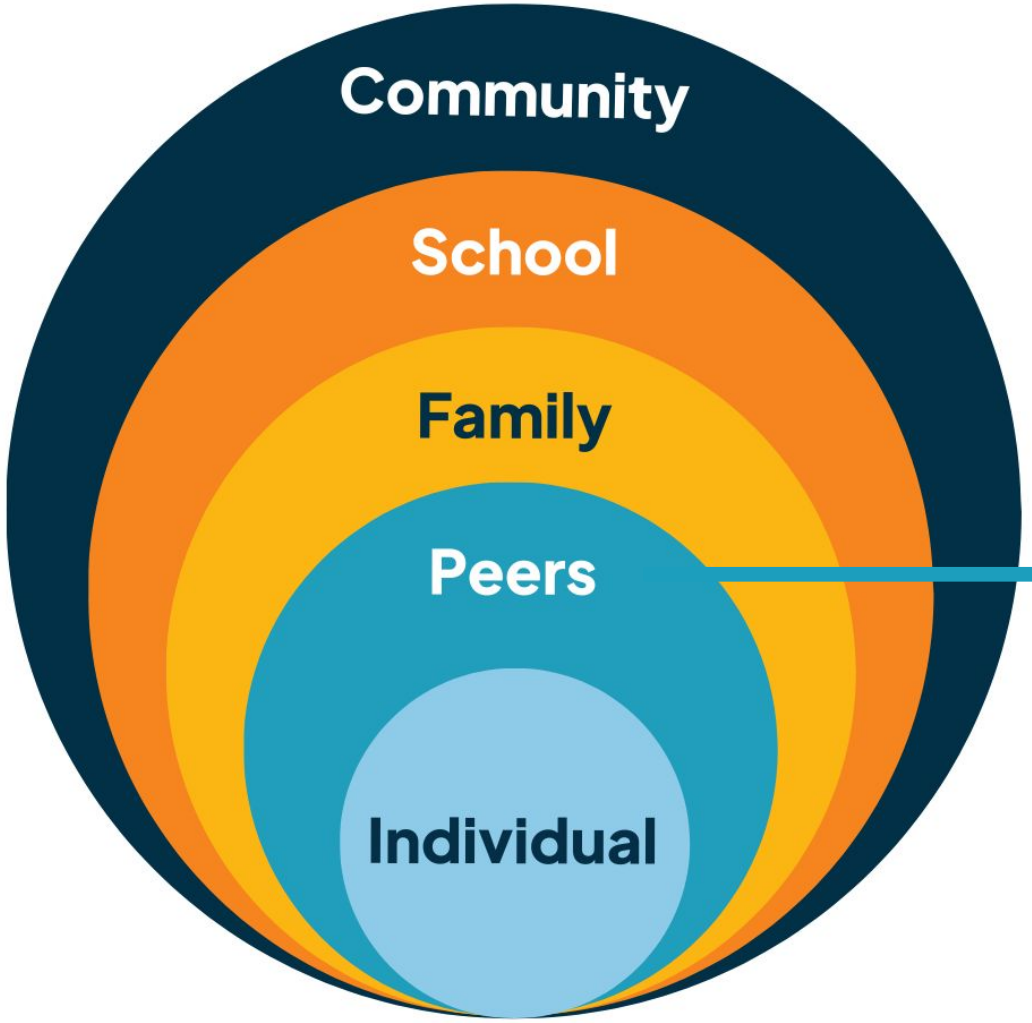
Risk & Protective Factors



Family Protective Factor:

Parental monitoring and family support reduces rates of substance use and poorer mental health for youth.

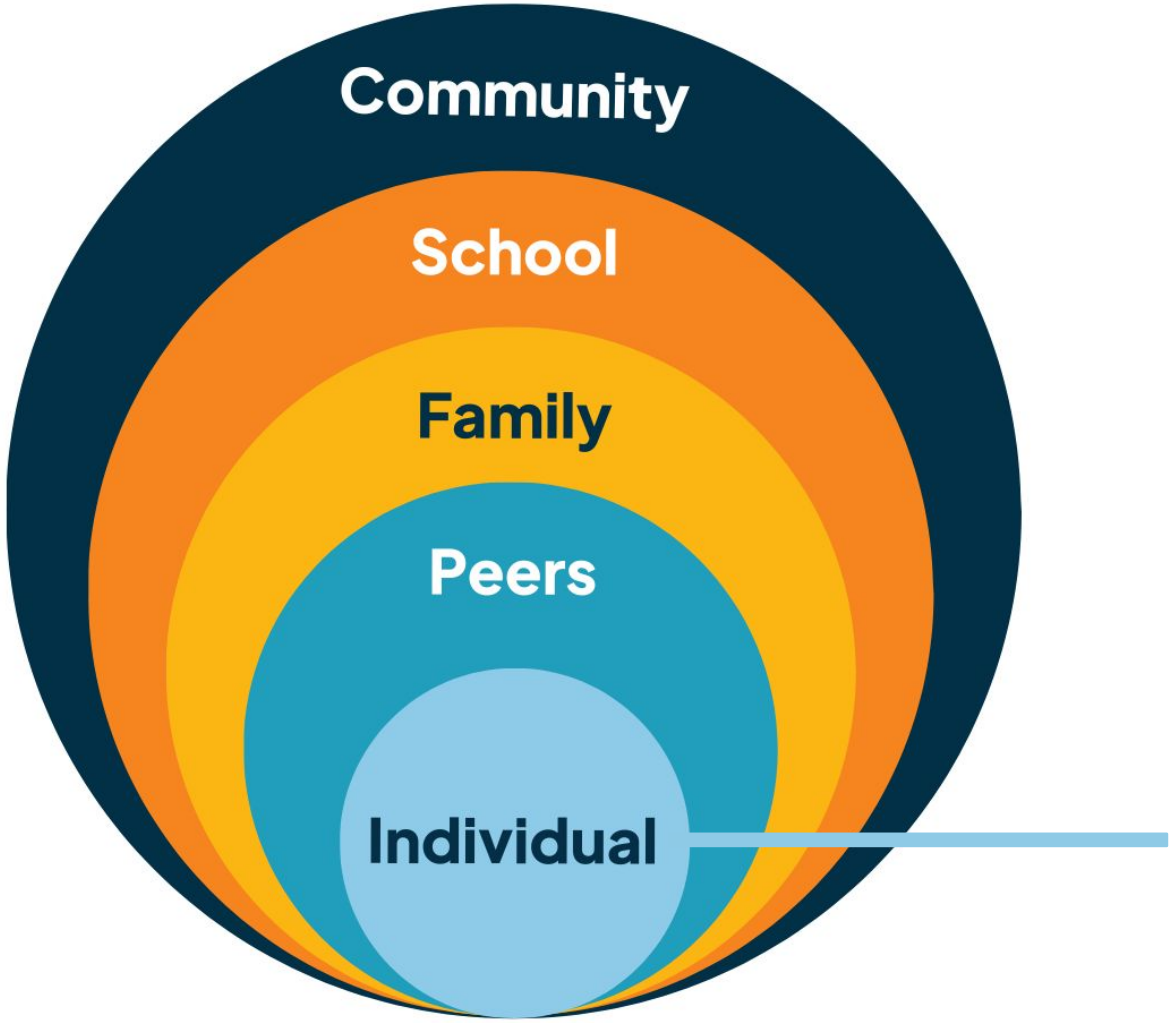
Risk & Protective Factors



Peer Protective Factor:

Peer norming of refusing substances, coping, and help-seeking as well as providing social support

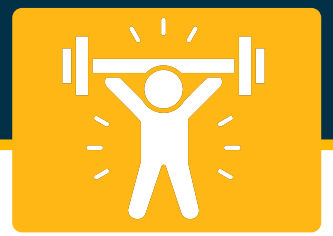
Risk & Protective Factors



Individual Protective Factor:

Mattering, individual physical and mental health, self-awareness, coping…

Benefits of The C4Y Process



Builds community capacity to improve youth well-being.



Keeps everyone focused on what truly matters.

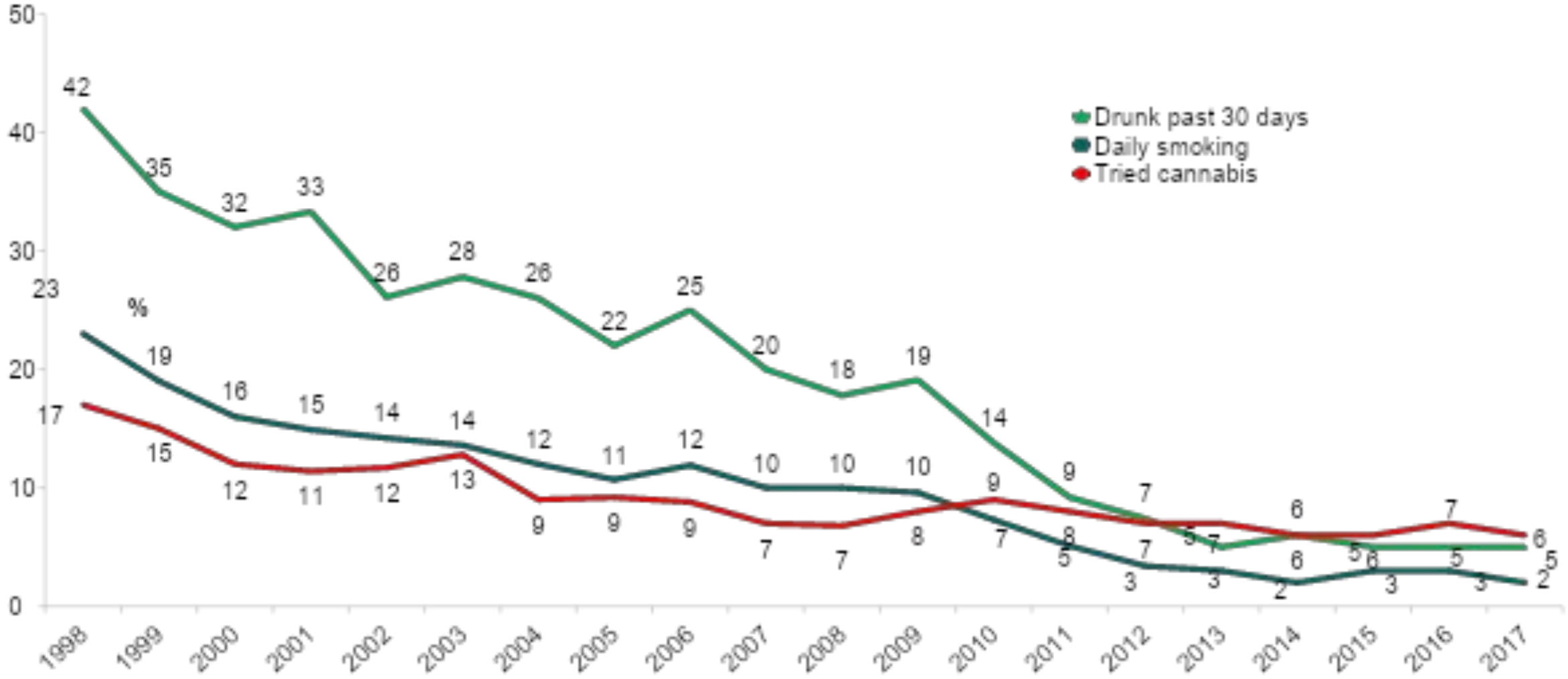


Helps community members see the role they can play.

Evidence says it works really well!

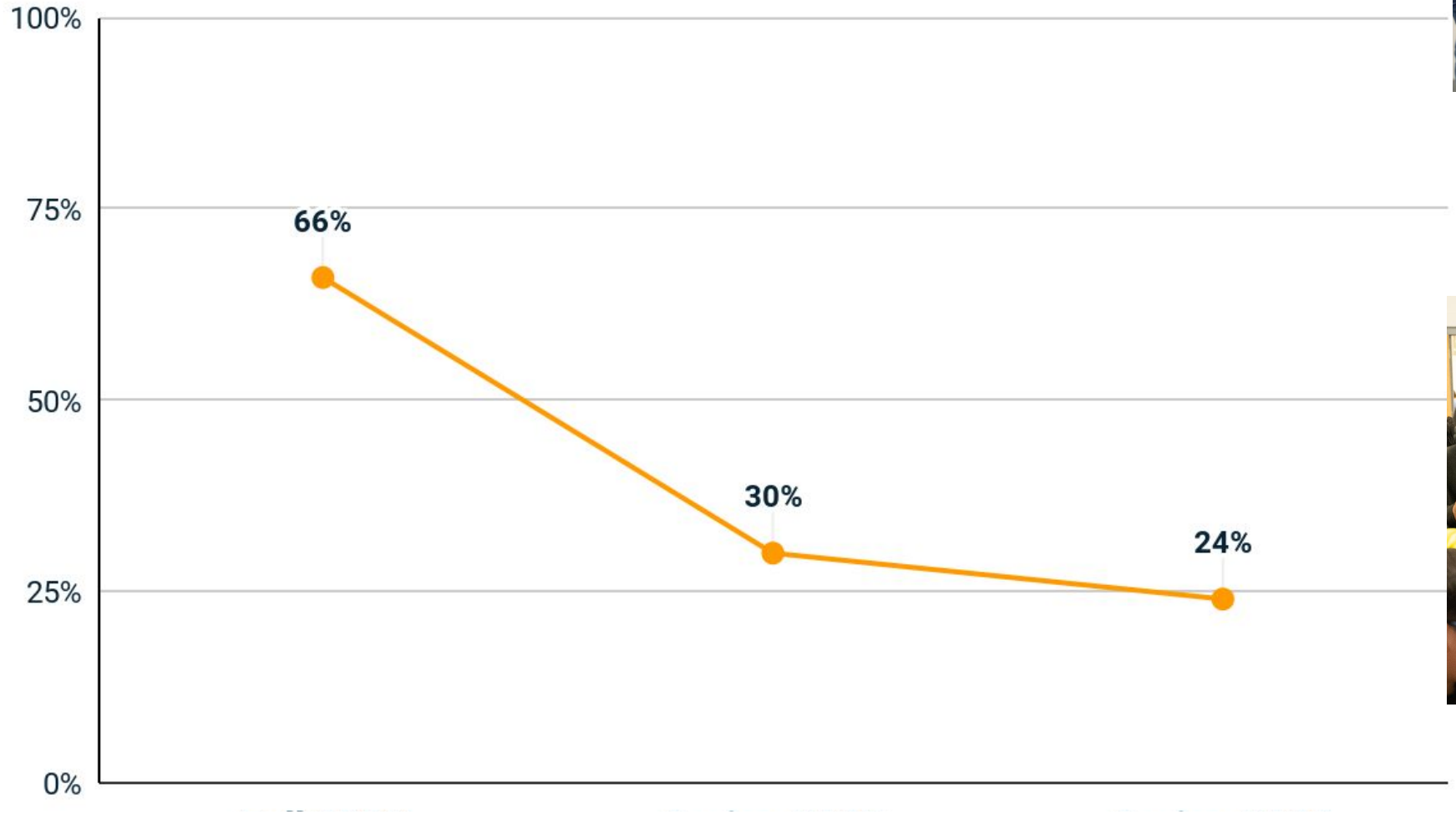
Iceland: Youth substance use over 20 years

(10th graders)



Something to celebrate...

Depression rates over time









COMMUNITIES FOR YOUTH

Well-being. Together.

Key Points



- Adolescent Development is a crucial time to “get it right” for youth well-being.
- Behavioral Health is a real challenge for Idaho’s Youth.
- Upstream Prevention can help us create lasting change because we are working at the root cause level.
- Upstream Prevention can help protect against lots of downstream outcomes instead of chasing each challenge as a separate issue.

Assignment #1

Instructions:

For this assignment, please work with your school team to discuss and complete the prompts below. While you are encouraged to collaborate as a team, each individual is responsible for uploading their own copy of the completed assignment to their individual account.

Assignment Prompt:

1. Identify two issues your school has been focusing on related to student wellness, behavior, or overall school climate.
2. Describe the types of prevention efforts you and your school community have been putting into place to address these issues.