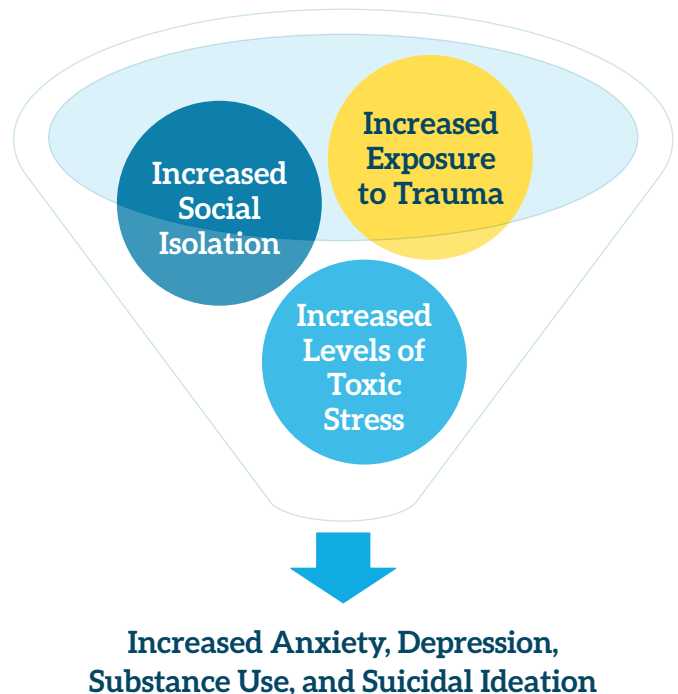# Responding to COVID-19:
Project Amp Can Help Students

The COVID-19 pandemic is harming the mental health and well-being of youth and young adults and increasing the risk of substance misuse and addiction. Project Amp is a successful school-based intervention that uses near-age peer mentors to reduce substance use and address underlying risk factors.

Prior to COVID-19, overdose deaths among people ages 10-24 were on the rise, increasing 58[1] percent over the last decade. Now, young people are experiencing heightened depression and anxiety because of COVID-19[2], further increasing these risks[3]. For many young people, COVID-19 has disrupted usual access to mental health services, reduced positive social connections, and eliminated many protective factors that alleviate the consequences of toxic stress and trauma[4]. As anxiety and depression increase among young people so does the risk for substance use and addiction, which could further exacerbate mental illness and suicide risk[5].

In addition to the consequences that substance use can have on academic outcomes[6], the negative effects of unaddressed youth substance use are often lifelong. Adolescence is a unique stage of brain development that puts youth who use alcohol and drugs at increased risk for developing addiction later in life. In fact, 74 to 90 percent of adults with substance use disorders began use before age 18[7]. As students return to class, schools must address the behavioral health consequences of COVID-19. Project Amp is a strategy that gets results and that students enjoy.

Impact of COVID-19 on Youth Behavioral Health

Increased Social Isolation

Increased Exposure to Trauma

Increased Levels of Toxic Stress

Increased Anxiety, Depression, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation

Why Project Amp?

Project Amp — adapted for in-person or remote implementation — connects young people at low-to-moderate risk of substance use with near-age peer mentors. By incorporating various evidence-based substance use prevention and early intervention practices, including screening and brief intervention[8], motivational interviewing[9], and peer support[10], Project Amp reduces substance use risk and improves coping mechanisms and self-efficacy[11].

Young people engaged in Project Amp report several benefits, including reduced substance use, improved stress management, and greater capacity to deal with difficult situations in school, with friends, or at home. Project Amp mentors — who self-identify as being in recovery from substance use disorders or related challenges — share their own recovery experiences, and report that youth are engaged and responsive. Project Amp mentors see that young people benefit from having someone to talk to and brainstorm healthy coping mechanisms, stress relief, and positive goal setting.

Project Amp Addresses COVID-19 Related Risks by Increasing Protective Factors[12]

Substance Use Risk Factors	COVID-19's Impact	Why Project Amp?
Trauma History: Youth with more traumatic experiences are at greater risk for alcohol and drug use.	**Trauma Exposure:** COVID-19 increases the risk for child abuse, neglect, and the death of a parent/caregiver.	**Coping Strategies and Stress Management:** Young People engaged in Project Amp have reported developing positive coping strategies for dealing with stress and difficult situations.
Mental Illness: Depression and anxiety increase risk for substance use among adolescents.	**Mental Illness:** More young people are experiencing moderate-to-severe anxiety and depression during COVID-19.	**Social Support:** Project Amp increases social connectedness. Mentors report that youth benefit from having someone to talk to, setting goals, and increasing social support.
Social isolation: Young people who have positive relationships with peers and adults are less likely to use drugs.	**Social isolation:** COVID-19 has increased social isolation.	
Parental substance use increases risk for youth use, according to the CDC.	**Parental substance use:** COVID-19 and its economic consequences have led to mass unemployment, increased substance use among caregivers and disrupted access to in-person substance use treatment and recovery services.	**Flexibility for In-Person and Virtual Use:** Project Amp is flexible and can be customized to the needs of specific youth and communities. It has also been adapted for remote use, by video or phone.

Endnotes

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    https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Planning/~/media/328D3B716A24449D8504357BD3865949.ashx

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This brief was generated in collaboration with Community Catalyst.

COMMUNITY CATALYST
*Because we all should have a say
in decisions that affect our health*

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