

Thomas Burr

Public Policy & Affiliate Relations Manager

NAMI Connecticut



As a member of NAMI for over 20 years, and a member of the NAMI Connecticut **staff** since February 2011, he has also served as a volunteer on both the NAMI Connecticut and NAMI Manchester Affiliate Boards; and is the former Board President of the Manchester Affiliate. His current focus is to help everyone in the State of Connecticut know about NAMI and what we provide to help folks affected by mental health challenges, as well as assisting our network of local NAMI Affiliates bring the entire spectrum of NAMI signature programs to their communities. In addition, represent the Organizations interests before the Connecticut State Legislature.



Tweens, Teens, Mental Health and the Dangers of Social Media

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Public Policy & Affiliate Relations Manager
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Today we will cover:

- What is mental health vs mental illness?
- The role of trauma in mental health
- How to maintain good mental health
- The good, the bad, & the ugly truth about the internet, social media, gaming apps, and AI
- What parents can do, and healthy tips for Tweens & Teens
- How to identify someone who may be struggling
- What to say, and what to do, and available resources
- Brief overview of the latest research and treatment options



What is Mental Health?

According to the World **Health** Organization (WHO), **mental health** is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”



What are Mental Illnesses?

- Mood disorders
- Thought disorders
- Anxiety disorders/phobias
- Co-occurring disorders



How Common are Mental Illnesses?



According to the experts*:

- 1-in-5 Adults in the US experience mental illness annually
- 1-in-25 Adults in the US experience serious mental illness annually
- 17% of youth aged 6-17 years experience a mental health disorder
- 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14; 75% by age 24
- For adults aged 60 or older, 1 in 8 had a mental illness in the past year

* Data from the CDC, NIMH, SAMHSA, and other sources

A topic that has received a lot of coverage in the news lately...

More Than Half of ADHD TikTok Videos Are Inaccurate

<https://www.newsmax.com/health/health-news/adhd-misinformation-tiktok/2025/03/20/id/1203637/>

The Impact Of Social Media On Teenagers Discussed In Fairfield

<https://patch.com/connecticut/fairfield/impact-social-media-teenagers-discussed-fairfield>

Social Media Is Bad for Kids. What's Being Done About It?

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-11-29/australia-s-social-media-ban-for-children-will-other-countries-follow-suit>

TikTok imposes restrictions on appearance filters for under 18

<https://thehill.com/policy/technology/5012154-tiktok-restricts-appearance-effects/>

Australia Has Barred Everyone Under 16 From Social Media. Will It Work?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/28/world/asia/australia-social-media-ban-law.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

States Sue TikTok, Claiming It Harms Kids' Mental Health

<https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/tiktok-lawsuit-children/2024/10/08/id/1183262/>

AG Tong recommends restrictions for children on social media apps

<https://ctmirror.org/2025/02/10/william-tong-children-social-media-restrictions/>

Governor Lamont calls for cell phone ban to limit distractions in schools

<https://www.wfsb.com/2024/08/07/governor-lamont-calls-cell-phone-ban-limit-distractions-schools/>



Photo by Hümâ H. Yardim on Unsplash.com

Vulnerable Brains

Dependent on hormones

- Compliments, attention , and admiration mean so much

And open to social rewards

- Brain neurotransmitter chemicals dopamine & oxytocin react to peers' positive attention

(APA, Abrams 8/3/2023)

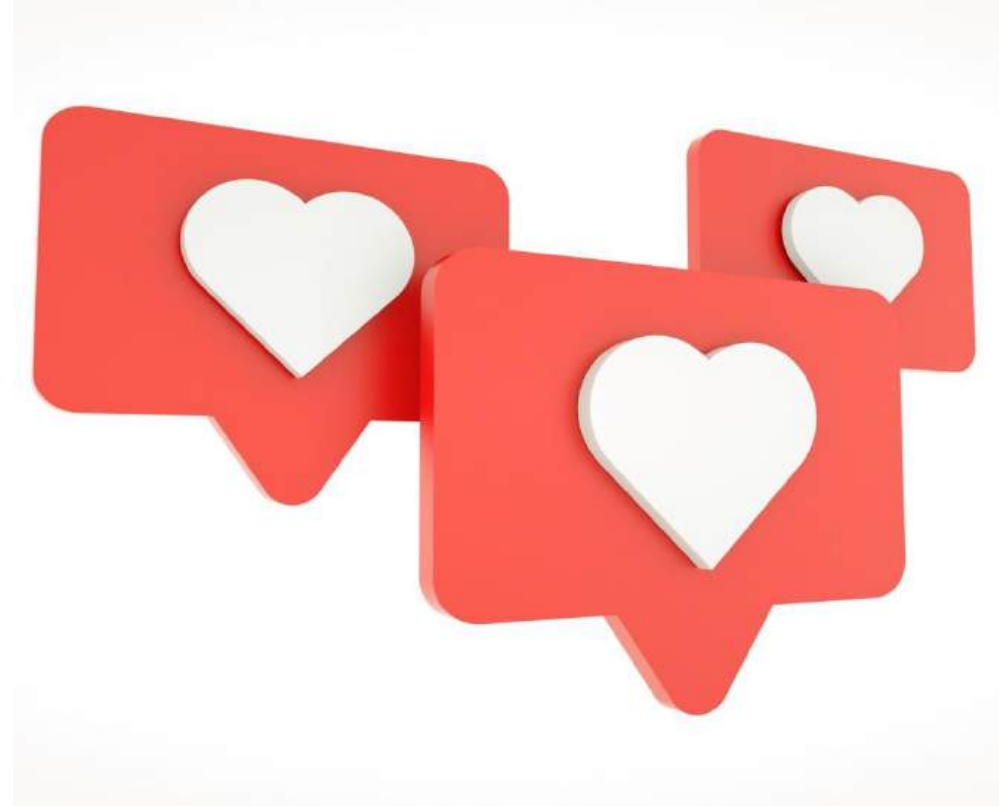


Image Courtesy of Microsoft Images

Social Rewards on Media Platforms

- Instagram
- YouTube
- TikTok
- Snapchat

(APA, Abrams 8/3/2023)



Drive for Approval: Healthy Social Skills & Connections

- Social media platforms become public & permanent
- Lacking privacy beyond social network
- No boundaries into predatory visibility

(APA, Abrams 8/3/2023)



Image Courtesy of Microsoft Images

Tween & Teens Want a Smartphone

- Pros: school projects, be just like their friends, communication with parents in emergencies
- Cons: too soon for social media, connecting in-person obsolete, changes in brain chemistry, potential for predatory misrepresentation
- Less parental awareness
- Unhealthy influences
- Cyberbullying
- Sexually explicit content



Photo by [Creative Christians](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The good, the bad, & the ugly truth about the internet, social media, & gaming apps

Video platforms for social exchange:

- YouTube
- TikTok
- Instagram

Online Gambling & Gaming Platforms:

- Games are designed to be addictive
- Online Gambling takes it to another level

And don't forget about the Internet in general:

- The worst stuff imaginable is only 2 clicks away



Photo by 🌟🐼💜🌟 on [Unsplash](#)

Apps that should be on your radar as a parent:



Source:

<https://susiesplace.org/the-latest-risky-apps-for-kids-and-teens-on-ios-and-android/>

And for younger kids, be aware about Roblox...



Roblox and Depression Rooms Article Link:

<https://ineqe.com/2023/02/22/roblox-depression-rooms/>

The Result for Teens

View media content for more than 3+ hours a day risks compromised mental health and wellbeing, i.e.

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Body image distortions
- Eating disorders

(Tribune News Service, 8/16/2024)



And let's not forget about the newcomer on the scene: AI – Artificial “Intelligence”

Schools, parents face teen mental health crisis with fear of students turning to AI therapists

<https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5462000-teen-mental-health-crisis-ai-therapists-chatbots/>

AI Is a Mass-Delusion Event

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2025/08/ai-mass-delusion-event/683909/>

Should You Trust an AI Mental Health App?

<https://natashatracy.com/mental-health/trust-ai-mental-health-apps/>

***BOTTOM LINE: Proceed with Caution!
And always keep Humans in the Loop!!***

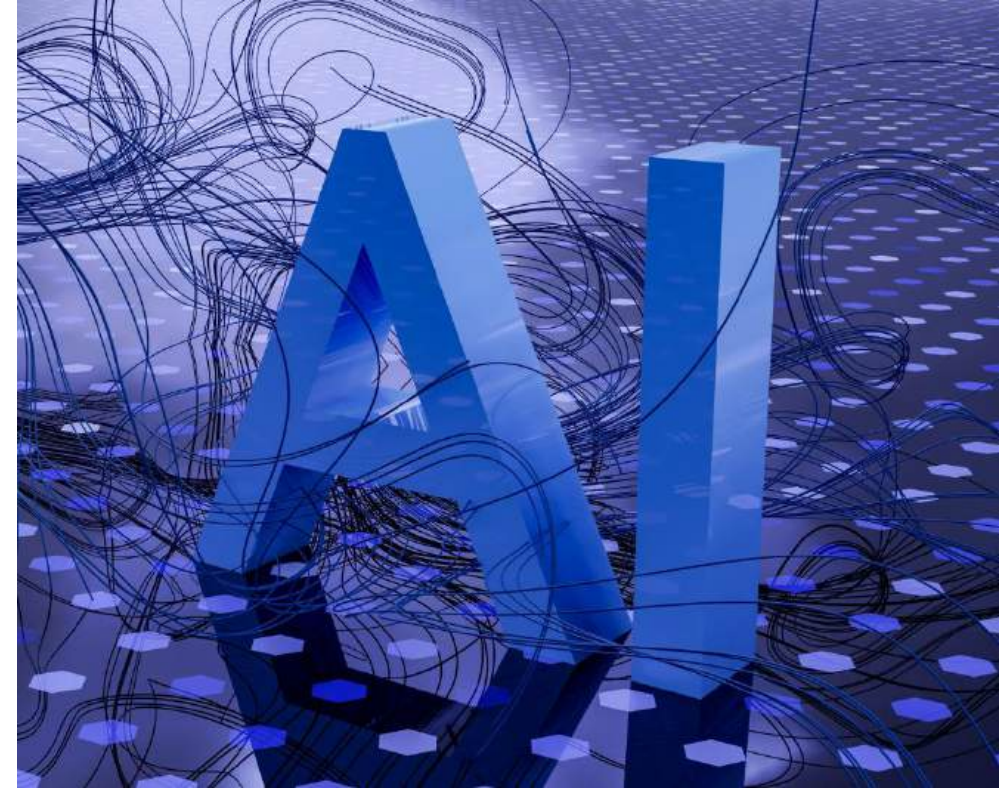


Photo by [Steve Johnson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

CT Department of Education 2024 Guidance

- **Remove or restrict phones on campus K-12**
 - Recommendations based on age of students
 - High schoolers developmentally ready to discipline themselves from use during school hours
 - Learn to balance social learning with classroom lessons
- **Ban on elementary and middle school possession of phone in classrooms**
 - Learning social skills from in-person interactions
 - Development of self-worth



Photo by [Mark Duffel](#) on [Unsplash](#)

(Cross, Alison. Hartford Courant, 8/21/2024)

A Crucial Conversation from a Role Model

Parent to Child

- Face to face

Open Communication

- Stress concerns in protecting Child's mental and emotional health
- Impress value in the real world, instead of cyberspace.

(Katella, Kathy Yale Medicine 6/17/2024)



Photo by Jarritos Mexican Soda on unsplash.com

Parental Recommendations



- Impose limits by age
- Start children with cell phones without email, Internet browsing, or other apps
- Use built-in parental controls that allow you to limit access to content, screen time, purchases and downloads, and manage privacy settings
- Monitor children's activities with smartphone
- Phones should be banned from bedrooms (good advice for parents, too!)
- Restore mental and emotional health with sleep, self care, and mental health treatments as needed

(Michaeleen Doucleff NPR, 7/12/2023)

How to identify someone who may be struggling

Be Aware of Changes in any of the Following:

- Increase in risky or unusual behaviors
- Attitude
- Participation in previous enjoyable activities
- Appearance
- Abuse of substances
- Delusions
- Hallucinations



The Role of Trauma in Mental Health



- What is Trauma?
- How Does Trauma Affect Mental Health?
- How Can Trauma be Treated?
- Trauma Focused Therapies

What to say, what to do, and available Resources





Start the CONVERSATION

Can you tell me more about what's happening? How you are feeling?

Have you had feelings like this in the past?

Sometimes you need to talk to an adult about your feelings. I'm here to listen. Would you like to talk with me?

Do you feel like you want to talk to someone else about how you're feeling?

What to do

If your loved one is considering suicide:

- Ask the question, “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- Don’t leave them alone
- Share relevant information with mental health contact

**If not, provide support and information,
and offer to assist in logistics**

**Consider taking the QPR Class (Question,
Persuade, Refer)**

Now that you know what to say, what are your Resources?



- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Crisis Numbers: 911 vs 211 vs 988 (Mobile Crisis Intervention Services)
- Crisis Text Line - Text "LISTEN" to 741-741, or 988
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255, or 988
- NAMI Connecticut: 860.882.0236
- NAMI Helpline: 800-950-6264, or TEXT NAMI to 741741
- Veterans Crisis Line: Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online, or send a text message to 838255

Maintaining Good Mental Health

It's all about living a healthy lifestyle

- Proper nutrition
- Good sleep
- Fresh air & exercise
- Maintaining connections to friends and family
- Limiting or eliminating drugs and/or alcohol
- Limiting or eliminating toxic relationships
- Managing stress
- Managing your focus
- Participating in therapy (as needed)
- Maintaining proper medication (if needed)
- Engaging in Spiritual pursuits & connections (if desired)
- Engaging with additional resources (if needed)



The Latest Research and Treatment Developments



- Trauma-focused Therapies
- New medications
- Brain-imaging Technologies
- DNA Analysis
- Mental Health Apps
- Increased Government Funding



The intersection of mental health, faith, and spirituality

NAMI Programs Overview



NAMI Connecticut has many types of Programming, which include:

- Support Groups for both Caregivers and People with Mental Health Conditions
- Educations Classes for the Public, the Workforce, Veterans, & School Settings
- General Mental Health Awareness Presentations
- Legislative Advocacy Training
- Programs for Faith-Based Communities
- Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training

And most of the above is free!

For More Information, Please Contact Us!

NAMI Connecticut
1030 New Britain Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06110
(860) 882-0236

www.namict.org

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instagram.com/namiconnecticut