

# Vaping & Mental Health

## Helping Students Develop Healthy Habits



This resource helps school staff support students who vape or self-disclose use through skill-building, stress management, and brief interventions. It promotes a health-focused, trauma-informed approach that emphasizes coping skills, support, and achievable goals.



### Why Vaping Feels Hard for Students to Quit

Vaping often *begins as a method of managing stress, boredom, or strong emotions.*

*Over time, the brain learns a pattern:*

**STRESS → VAPE → TEMPORARY RELIEF**

This creates a habit loop involving:

- Thoughts (“*Vaping will help me calm down.*”)
- Emotional states (*stress, anxiety, irritability*)
- Behavioral responses (*vaping*)

*With support and practice, this loop can be replaced with a healthier pattern:*

**STRESS → COPING SKILL → RELIEF**

- Thoughts (“*I can try a coping skill instead.*”)
- Emotional states (*stress, frustration*)
- Behavioral responses (*breathing, movement, talking to someone*)

Students may not recognize that this loop is learned and can be changed. Helping students identify the connection between their thoughts, feelings, and actions can support motivation and behavior change. Emphasize that vaping is not a coping strategy — and that *the brain can learn healthier skills over time.*

Use  
**P.A.C.E.**  
to Coach  
Coping Skills



**P** **Phone a friend**  
Encourage contacting a trusted adult or peer for support.

**A** **Activity**  
Suggest walking, stretching, sports, or other short movement breaks.

**C** **Create or Cope**  
Guide students to expressive outlets such as journaling, music, art, gaming, or sensory tools (*stress balls, fidgets*).

**E** **Examine the thought**  
Ask: “*What am I telling myself right now?*”  
“*What’s one healthy choice I can make for the next few minutes?*”



### Reinforce Skill-Building and Motivation

*Each time a student uses a coping strategy instead of vaping, they are...*

- Strengthening self-regulation through coping skills practice and mindful choices
- Reducing nicotine dependence
- Learning healthier stress responses
- Clarifying personal motivations by reflecting on their own reasons to quit or reduce use

### KEY MESSAGE

Quitting is not about willpower alone — it is about *learning coping skills and having support*. Frame progress as practice, not perfection, and celebrate small steps toward healthier choices.

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## Evidence-Based Youth Resources

Staff may share or review these with students and families:

[Helpful Tips for Protecting Youth from the Harms of Vaping | Smoking and Tobacco Use \(CDC\)](#)

[Find Help Quitting Tobacco, E-cigarettes, and Vaping \(SAMHSA\)](#)

[Get Help \(988 Lifeline\)](#)

[Smokefree Teen](#)

### Disclaimer:

The above resources and links are for informational purposes only and do not represent official policies, procedures, or guidance of the Tennessee Department of Education (department). The department bears no responsibility for the accuracy, legality, or content of the external sites. Educators and families are responsible for reviewing and determining the appropriateness of resources for their students and communities. It is recommended that all content be carefully evaluated to ensure alignment with student needs.