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For Immediate Release

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Free Mind Campaign to Support Youth Mental Health

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is highlighting an important new initiative from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) designed to support the mental health of young people and prevent substance misuse and overdose.

The Free Mind campaign is a research-based effort aimed at educating young people about the risks of substance use while promoting open, supportive conversations between teens and caring adults in their lives. With the powerful reminder that “It’s okay to not be okay,” the campaign encourages young people to speak up about their mental health and seek help when they need it.

Mental health challenges like anxiety and depression often occur alongside substance use disorders. Reducing stigma and creating safe spaces for conversations can empower teens to take charge of their health and reduce the risk of overdose and long-term consequences.

“The Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Study (NRPFS) from 2023 in Southwest Nebraska, indicates that 26.9% of 8th graders, 38.5% of 10th graders and 34.3% of 12th graders reported feeling depressed.” States Myra Stoney, Health Director.

“We want young people in our communities to know they are not alone,” said Kay Schmidt, Emergency Response Coordinator at SWNPHD. “The Free Mind campaign provides honest, relatable information that can spark life-saving conversations between teens and the adults who care about them.”

The CDC offers valuable resources as part of the campaign, including downloadable fact sheets that help explain the risks and realities facing youth today:

- The Connection Between Teen Mental Health and Drug Use - [Download Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#)
- Fake Pills: What Youth Need to Know - [Download Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#)

To explore the full campaign and find additional resources, visit cdc.gov/freemind.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health or substance use, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for free and confidential support, available 24/7.

For more information about mental health resources talk to your mental health provider or contact SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow SWNPHD on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram or view the website at www.swhealth.ne.gov which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health.