



# Substance Use and Abuse Among Youth in Kinship Care & Foster Care in Washington State

## Substance Use and Abuse Among Youth in Living in Kinship Care and Foster Care

Substance use and abuse among adolescents is strongly influenced by social experiences and family living arrangements.<sup>1</sup> Youth living in kinship care and foster care have often experienced more trauma and instability than youth living with their parents.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that youth who have experienced trauma and instability have higher rates of drug and alcohol use and abuse.<sup>2</sup> This is due to substance use and abuse being a [maladapted] form of coping with traumatic experiences.<sup>2</sup> Research also shows that using drugs and alcohol in early adolescence increases the likelihood of developing substance use disorders later in life.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, increased stability and fewer family and life disruptions reduce substance use and abuse.<sup>3</sup> Young people with stable living arrangements who are connected to their communities and involved in prosocial activities are less likely to use or abuse drugs and alcohol.<sup>4</sup> Kinship care is less traumatic for youth than foster care and provides stability that maintains connections with youths' families, communities and cultures.<sup>17</sup> As a result, while youth living in foster care and kinship care both have higher rates of substance use and abuse than their community peers living with their parents,<sup>1 5 6 7 8 9</sup> youth living in kinship care use drugs and alcohol at significantly lower rates than youth living in foster care.<sup>1 5 10 11</sup>

## What is Kinship Care?

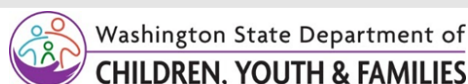
Kinship care refers to the full-time care of a youth by a relative or another adult who has a close relationship with the youth and their family.<sup>12</sup> Kinship care can be either formal or informal, depending on the level of child welfare services involvement.<sup>12 13</sup> Formal kinship care is state-mandated, whereas informal kinship care can be state-mediated (e.g., kinship diversion) or state-independent (a private kinship care arrangement).<sup>13</sup> Over seven million youth in the United States live in households headed by kinship caregivers.<sup>14 15 16 17</sup> Most of these kinship placements are informal arrangements made without the involvement of the child welfare system.<sup>17 18 19</sup> It is estimated that 1 in 11 youth will live in kinship care at some point before the age of 18.<sup>17</sup>

## Benefits of Kinship Care on Substance Use Among Youth in Out-of-Home Care

Kinship care is preferred over foster care because it keeps youth in familiar community contexts and is less traumatic and more cost-effective than foster care.<sup>17</sup> In communities that have experienced high levels of overrepresentation in the child welfare system, such as Indigenous,<sup>21</sup> African American,<sup>22</sup> and Latino<sup>23</sup> communities, kinship care is also an important cultural resource for maintaining cultural continuity. Maintaining youth with their extended families improves well-being, increases permanency, and preserves youths' cultural identity and community connections.<sup>11 15 17 24 25</sup> These positive connections reduce substance use and abuse.<sup>29</sup> Youth in kinship care are less likely to have unstable placements and have fewer peer and educational disruptions than youth in foster care. Stability is vital for strong behavioral health and well-being.<sup>10 26 27</sup> Instability, particularly multiple placement changes and peer disruptions, increase the risk for substance use and abuse among adolescents.<sup>1 28</sup> The added stability provided by kinship care arrangements is a key factor why, compared to youth living in foster care, youth living in kinship care have fewer behavioral health problems and lower rates of substance abuse.<sup>1 11</sup> For youth living separate from their parents, living in a kinship care arrangement is a protective factor against substance use and abuse<sup>8 9</sup> and represents a key resource for ensuring that youth can maintain strong connections to their families and communities vital for healthy adolescent development and well-being. While kinship care can act as a protective factor against substance use and abuse in comparison to foster care, many youth living in kinship care arrangements still are at high risk for substance use and abuse due to experiences of trauma. It is vital that kinship caregivers have access to trauma-informed training and supports to help them support youth and better understand the relationships between instability and traumatic experiences on substance use among youth separated from their parents.

## Substance Use Outcomes Among Youth Living in Kinship Care in Washington State

This fact sheet compares substance use outcomes of youth who live in kinship care with youth who live in foster care in Washington State. The data used in this fact sheet comes from the 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS). The HYS is a biannual survey that includes 8th, 10th, and 12th-grade public school students.<sup>30</sup> The survey offers a representative sample of young people in Washington State and provides important details about their health and well-being and helps guide policies to support healthy youth and families.<sup>30</sup>



## Living in Kinship Care

5,410 Youth

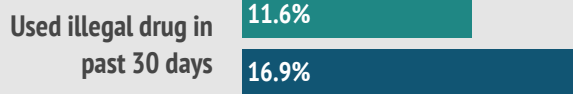
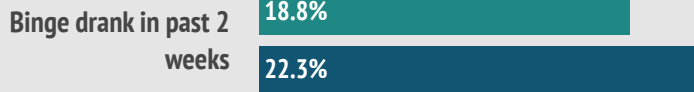
## Living in Foster Care

794 Youth

## Washington State

## Healthy Youth Survey

**Sample:** The 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) sample included 148,500 public high school students in 8th, 10th and 12th grade. Youths' living situations were determined based on the question: *Who did you live with most of the time in the last 30 days?*



### Recent Alcohol & Drug Use

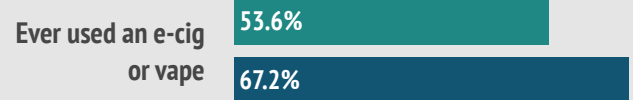
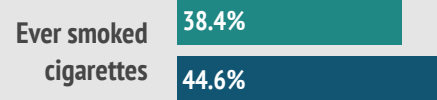
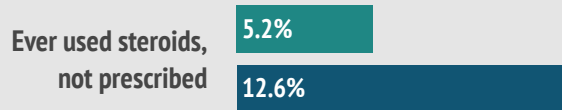
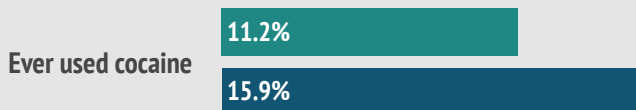
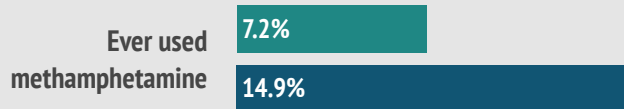
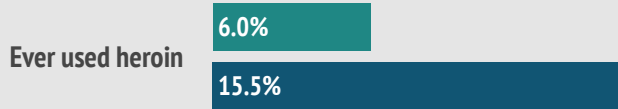
Youth living in kinship care were significantly less likely to say that they had recently used alcohol or drugs. In comparison, among youth living in foster care, the rate of:

- Having binge drank in the past two weeks was **1.2** times higher
- Having used illegal drugs in the past month was **1.6** times higher
- Having used painkillers to get high in the past month was **1.8** times higher

### Tobacco Use

Youth living in kinship care were significantly less likely to say that they had used tobacco products. In comparison, among youth living in foster care, the rate of:

- Having smoked cigarettes in the past month was **1.5** times higher
- Having used an e-cig or vape in the past month was **1.3** times higher
- Having ever smoked cigarettes was **1.4** times higher
- Having ever used an e-cig or vape was **1.8** times higher.



### Lifetime Drug Use

Youth living in kinship care were significantly less likely to say that they had ever used drugs. In comparison, among youth living in foster care, the rate of:

- Having ever used heroin was **2.9** times higher
- Having ever used methamphetamine was **2.3** times higher
- Having ever used cocaine was **1.5** times higher
- Having ever used non-prescribed steroids was **2.8** higher



### Key Takeaways from the Washington Healthy Youth Survey

- Youth living in kinship care have lower rates of tobacco, alcohol, and drug use than youth living in foster care.
- Kinship care is a protective factor that supports continuity in family, peer, and community connections. These connections help keep youth away from substance use and abuse.

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