

Juuling – What Every Parent and Educator Must Know

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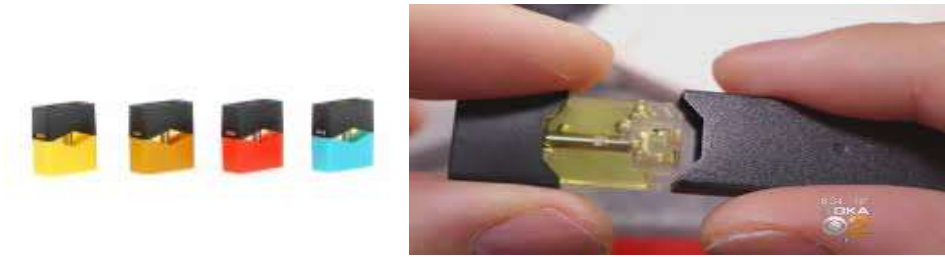
There has been a trend sweeping across the country over the past few years, causing widespread concern among parents, schools, and medical professionals from every field. This trend is known as vaping, and it refers to the use of electronic cigarettes. The term itself – vaping – is quite misleading. Vaping sounds as if e-cigarettes produce water vapor, which they most certainly do not. Vaping actually creates an aerosol consisting of very fine particles. Electronic cigarettes, which have been on the market since 2003, were first introduced as a safe alternative to traditional cigarettes. Cigarette smokers would be able to switch to a product that provided a similar experience to smoking without all of the harmful carcinogens. Electronic cigarettes are used by many as a method to quit smoking, although the jury is still out on the efficacy of this method. It is not surprising, though, that the e-cigarette market has extended far beyond former smokers.

One group which these products have been very successful in attracting is adolescents, and there is one product in particular that has really taken hold among middle and high school students. This product is the Juul, and the use of it is commonly referred to as “Juuling.” The Juul is a vaping device that resembles a flash drive, and can be charged using a USB port. Since its release in June of 2015, Juul has seen a 700 percent increase in sales and as of January, 2018 it accounts for almost half of the e-cigarette market. It is difficult to say how much of its success can be attributed to underage vaping. The legal age for the purchase of tobacco and e-cigarette products in St Louis City and St. Louis County is 21.

JUUL Labs, which produces the Juul, claims that their products were designed specifically for former adult smokers, and that they in no way advertise to a youth market. Whether they intentionally do so or not, it is clear that a large number of teens who are using vaping products are choosing the Juul. Because of their sleek design and resemblance to flash drives, Juuls are easy to conceal and to use in a number of locations: school, bedrooms, cars, etc. Students even admit to Juuling in the classroom unbeknownst to teachers. The “smoke-like” substance that is exhaled is also quite minimal, which allows for an even greater ease of use. Juul may also be appealing to underage users because of the different flavors that are available. Juul Pods (small plastic containers filled with flavored nicotine liquid) come in traditional tobacco and menthol flavors, but users can also choose from a very wide variety of flavors, including mango, cool cucumber, fruit medley, and crème brulee. The Juul starter pack, which includes a battery, charger, and a 4 pack of pods, retails on their website for \$49.99 and refill pods sell for \$15.99 (4 pods per pack).

Each Juul pod, which lasts about 200 puffs, contains 59 mg of nicotine, which is equivalent to a pack of cigarettes. It should be noted that this is one of the highest concentrations of nicotine among all e-cigarette products. Only customers 21 and older are able to buy Juul products from their website. They claim to have a “state of the art age verification process” to make sure that no underage customers are able to purchase their products. This process is simply typing in a name and date of birth. Underage customers can use someone else’s name and DOB; a brother/sister, friend, or even a parent. Juuls are also available at a number of brick and mortar stores throughout the St. Louis area. Along with purchasing Juuls online and from stores, there are thriving black markets for illegal purchases in many of our schools. One student stated, “All of the drug dealers in





my school stopped selling drugs and started selling Juuls; there is more money and less serious consequences if they get caught.”

One of the major draws of Juuls and other vaping products are the claim that they are safe. Most users believe that there are few to no health risks involved with vaping. These claims are coming from the same industry that made similar claims about cigarettes. The fact is that it is not yet clear the extent to which these products are harmful. This is because there is so little long-term data on the subject. But it is clear that many teenagers and adults alike are under the assumption that vaping is a harmless activity.

While Juuls may contain fewer toxic substances than a traditional cigarette, they still contain:

- Nicotine
- Ultrafine particles that are inhaled deep into the lungs
- Flavorings such as diacetyl, a chemical linked to serious lung disease
- Volatile organic compounds
- Heavy metals, such as nickel, tin, and lead

These products are being widely used by older children and teenagers. The claim that they are safer than cigarettes may or may not be true, but should that matter to us? E-cigarettes contain nicotine, one of the most addictive drugs in existence. Exposure to this substance during adolescence is dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. The part of the brain that is responsible for decision making and impulse control is not yet fully developed during adolescence; young people are more likely to take risks with their health and safety than adults.

Adolescents are uniquely at risk for long term, long lasting effects of exposing their brains to nicotine. These risks include addiction, mood disorders, and permanent lowering of impulse control. Nicotine changes how the synapses in the brain are formed, which can harm the parts of the brain that control attention and learning. E-cigarette use among adolescents is also strongly linked to the use of other tobacco products, such as cigarettes and chewing tobacco. Some evidence suggests that e-cigarette use is linked to the use of alcohol and other substances. It should be noted that some vaping devices can also be used to smoke marijuana concentrates, such as oils and waxes.

Juuling does not appear to be a passing trend among teenagers. This is due in part to the fact that these products are so highly addictive. If nicotine addiction is something you or someone you know is struggling with, there are resources available and safe, proven methods for quitting. For more information on this issue, please contact West County Psychological Associates at www.wcpastl.com or call us at 314-275-8599.



Tony Tramelli, MA, LPC provides therapy to individuals, couples, and families on a number of issues, including depression, anxiety, grief, behavioral issues, and academic problems. In addition, Tony provides therapy for individuals, couples, and families struggling with issues around technology and addiction. He provides presentations and seminars to schools and parents on a number of different issues, including vaping.