



Despite the endless apps and websites available at their fingertips, officials say teenagers are more disconnected than ever from their mental and emotional health.

“We see a disconnect with teens being able to talk to their parents about issues and parents come in sometimes and say there’s things coming up with their kids and they don’t know how to talk to them about it,” said Nichole Chapa, aftercare and prevention counselor at Brighton’s Center for Behavioral Health.

To help local teenagers with their mental and emotional health, the Brighton Health Clinic launched a bi-weekly teen support group on June 18. Sessions will be held on the first and third Monday every month from 2 to 3 p.m. at the Center for Behavioral Health in Brighton.

The support group is open to Tribal teens from 13 to 19 years old to learn and practice social and coping skills, process emotions and receive feedback from their peers and health professionals. While teenagers will primarily run the group’s dialogue, Chapa or another facilitator will always be present to ensure no bullying or negative comments happen during discussions. The Center for Behavioral Health will also occasionally bring in counselors or other speakers to discuss specific topics, such as depression or anxiety.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 3 million teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 had at least one major depressive episode in 2016. Adolescent females were 13 percent more likely to be impacted than adolescent males.

“A lot of teens feel like they don’t get a chance to speak very much, and even when they are speaking with their friends it’s not really about anything too serious,” Chapa said. “With friends, you usually talk about things more light-hearted, but if you have a group that is specifically for support, it could maybe allow them to feel like they can be more open, that they can talk more and feel more understood.”

Chapa hopes that teens will quickly know that the support group is a judgement-free zone and that all discussions will be confidential.

“It’s going to be a place where you can express yourself and make connections that you didn’t know you could,” she explained. “People tend to stay with their own groups and this could get people to see that there’s support in the community they might not have had before.”

The Mayo Clinic recommends that parents help prevent mental illness in children by encouraging them to develop friendships and social groups, stay physically active, reduce their electronic time, get enough sleep, and to seek help as soon as they begin experiencing depression symptoms.

If the support group is successful in Brighton, the Center for Behavioral Health plans to expand the support group to other reservations.

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