UNFILTERED:

YOUTH VOICES IMPACTED BY NICOTINE

A Comprehensive Look at Youth Perspectives on Nicotine Use

Arranged by:

NORTHWOODS tobacco FREE COALITION

Made in collaboration with:

PARTNERSHIP FOR A TOBACCO FREE WISCONSIN

FACT

In Their Own Words:

THE YOUTH VOICE PROJECT

The Youth Voice Project offered an opportunity to understand the effects of vaping through the perspectives of our most vulnerable stakeholders—our children.

Over 100 youth in the Northwoods between the ages of 10-13 shared their personal experiences with vaping and nicotine use. They weren't asked about their own use, but rather how these substances have impacted their lives, their families, and their communities.

Their stories reveal powerful truths: family bonds strained by addiction, the emotional weight carried by children watching loved ones struggle, and the surprising depth of understanding these youth have developed about health risks.

These aren't just statistics. They're real experiences from children navigating a world where vaping touches nearly every aspect of their young lives. Their words, sometimes heartbreaking always insightful, show us the effects of nicotine use through the eyes of those who see it most clearly.

By sharing these authentic youth perspectives, we hope to broaden understanding of how deeply vaping affects the wellbeing of children in our communities. These insights, coming directly from the next generation, deserve our attention.

METHODOLOGY

- Responses were collected from youth using in-person methods across various settings. The majority of responses were gathered in school environments, while others were collected at youth serving organizations. No data was collected through email, online platforms, or virtual tools.

- A facilitator toolkit was created to guide the data collection process. This toolkit included a structured lesson plan intended to provide context and support meaningful engagement with the topic.

- **All participants were asked the same open-ended question: "How have vaping and nicotine impacted your life?"**

- Participants recorded their responses by hand on a half-sheet of paper provided during the activity. This method allowed for spontaneous, personal reflections in the participants' own words.

Demographics OVERVIEW

Total Responses: 102 youth across three counties

Lincoln County: 44 responses (43.6%)

Oneida County: 9 responses (8%)

Vilas County: 49 responses (48.5%)

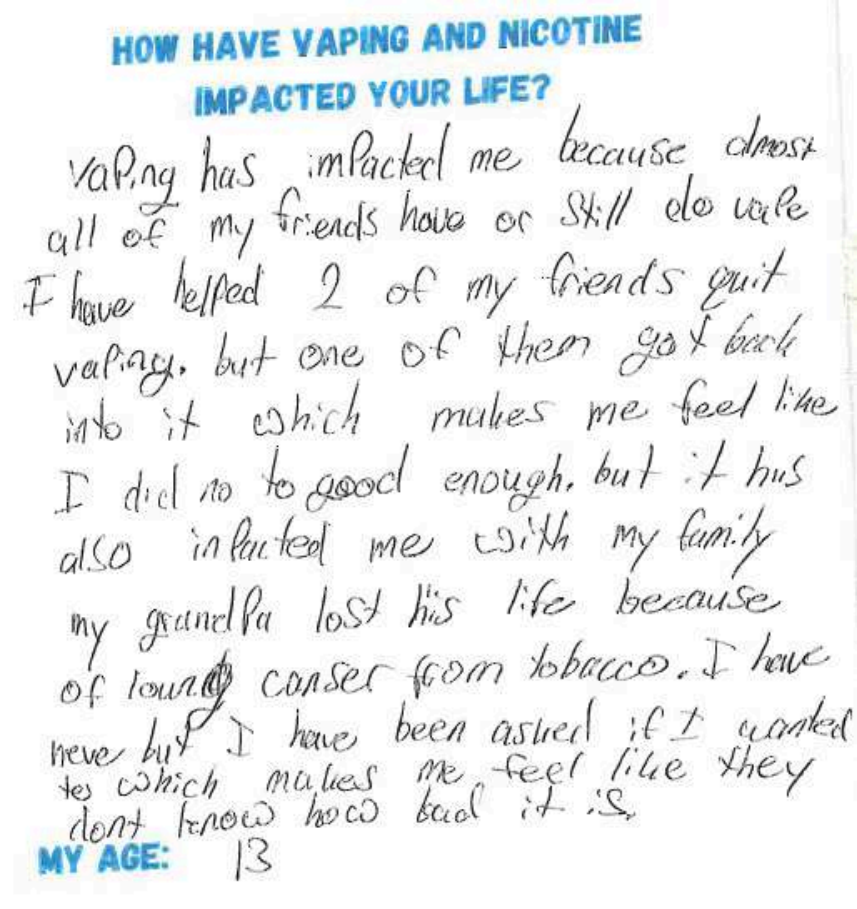
Age Distribution

- **Ages 10-11**: 33 youth (32.7%)
- **Age 12**: 27 youth (26.7%)
- **Age 13:** 18 youth (17.8%)
- **Age 14**: 1 youth (1.0%)
- **Age not reported**: 22 youth (21.8%)

Additional youth organizations in the NWTFC region can join this program anytime. Contact your tobacco county lead (listed at the back of this report) to get started.

Understanding KEY THEMES

#1: Family and Friend Health Concerns: "I just want them to be healthy"



HOW HAVE VAPING AND NICOTINE IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

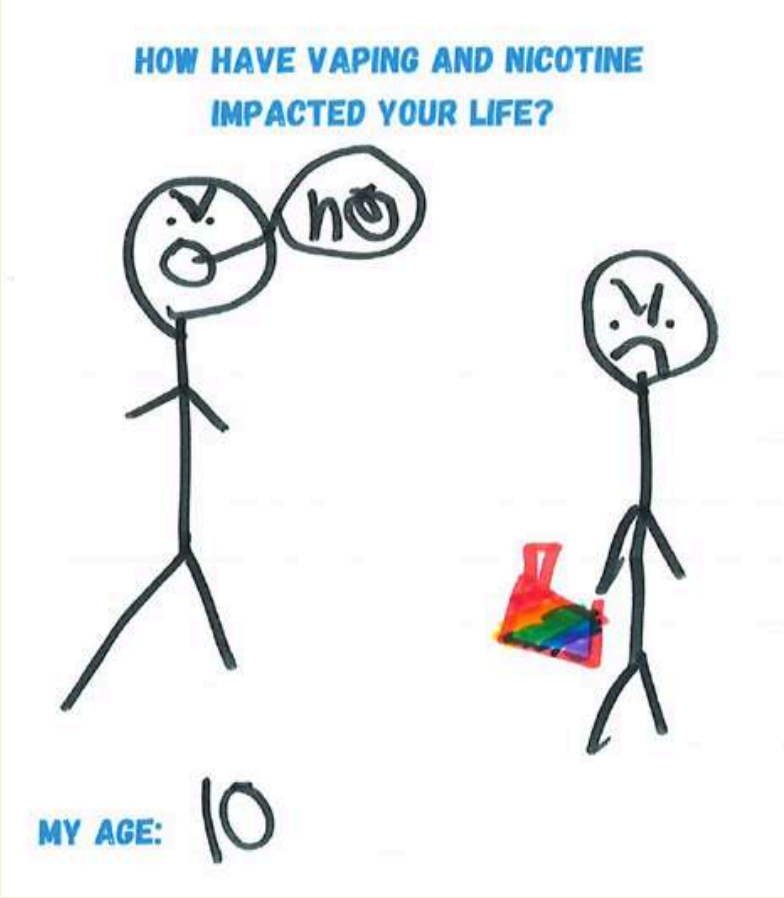
vaping has impacted me because almost all of my friends have or still do vape I have helped 2 of my friends quit vaping. but one of them got back into it which makes me feel like I did no to good enough. but it has also inpacted me with my family my grandpa lost his life because of lung canser from tobacco. I have neve but I have been asked if I wanted to which makes me feel like they dont know how bad it is.

MY AGE: 13

Most youth (92%) worry about family members and their friends who vape or smoke. They share stories about grandparents with lung cancer and parents or friends struggling with addiction. Several students mention helping friends quit vaping. Our youth see the health problems caused by nicotine dependence firsthand. They don't just know about the risks, they care deeply about their family and friends health.

Understanding KEY THEMES

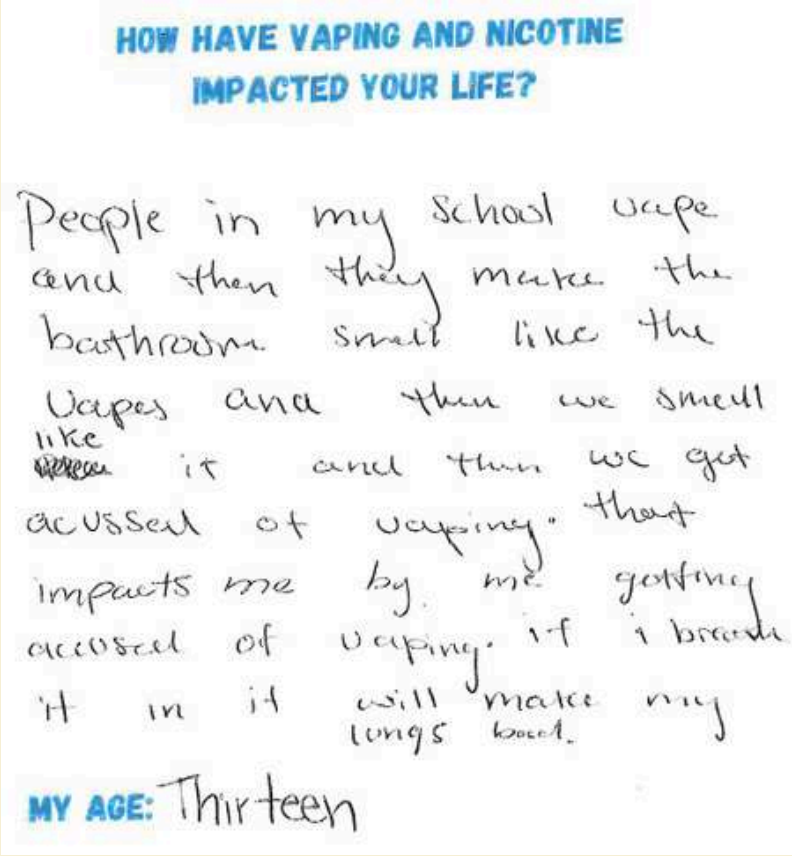
#2: Marketing Impact: "Even though it looks good, it's really bad for you"



Youth demonstrated great awareness of how vaping products are marketed to appear attractive and appealing. Many responses specifically mentioned bright colors, and appealing flavors, elements designed to draw interest. Their observations align with research findings on how vaping product design and flavoring target younger audiences.

Understanding KEY THEMES

#3: Second Hand Exposure: "When someone uses nicotine next to me and I breathe in I can get a headache or feel sick."



HOW HAVE VAPING AND NICOTINE IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

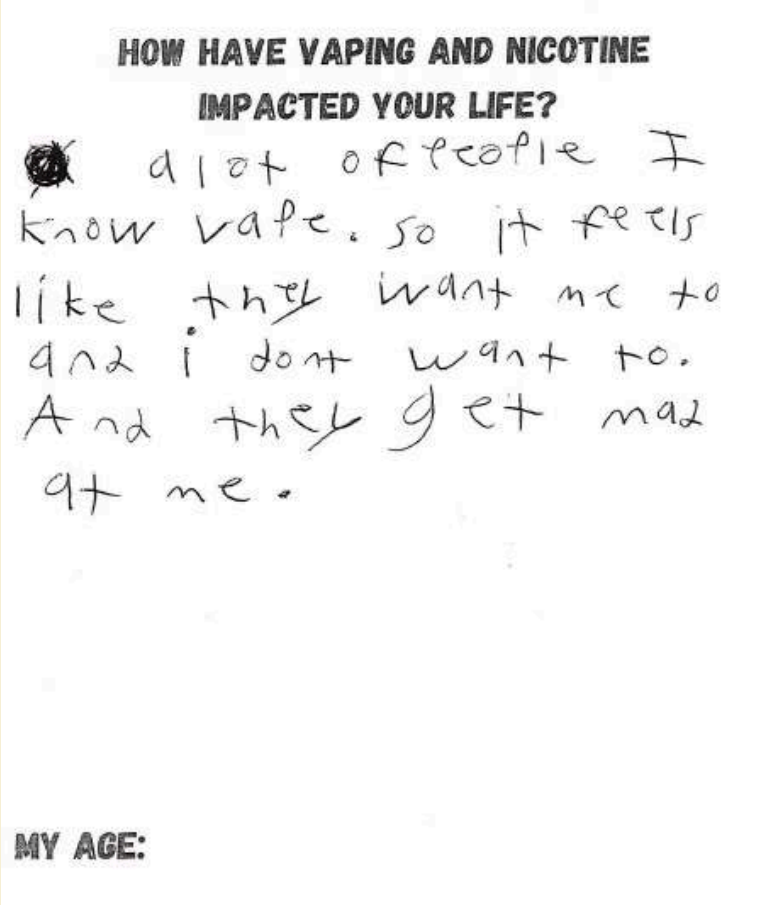
People in my school vape and then they make the bathroom smell like the vapes and then we smell like it and then we get accussed of vaping. that impacts me by me getting accused of vaping. if i breath it in it will make my lungs bad.

MY AGE: Thirteen

One in four youth describe being involuntarily exposed to nicotine through secondhand smoke and vapor in their own homes and other spaces where they should feel safe. Youth report immediate physical reactions including headaches, nausea, and coughing when family and friends smoke or vape around them, leaving them feeling powerless to protect their own health in environments where they have no control.

Understanding KEY THEMES

#4: Peer Pressure: "People in my school vape and then they make the bathroom smell"



HOW HAVE VAPING AND NICOTINE IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

a lot of people I know vape. so it feels like they want me to and i dont want to. And they get mad at me.

MY AGE:

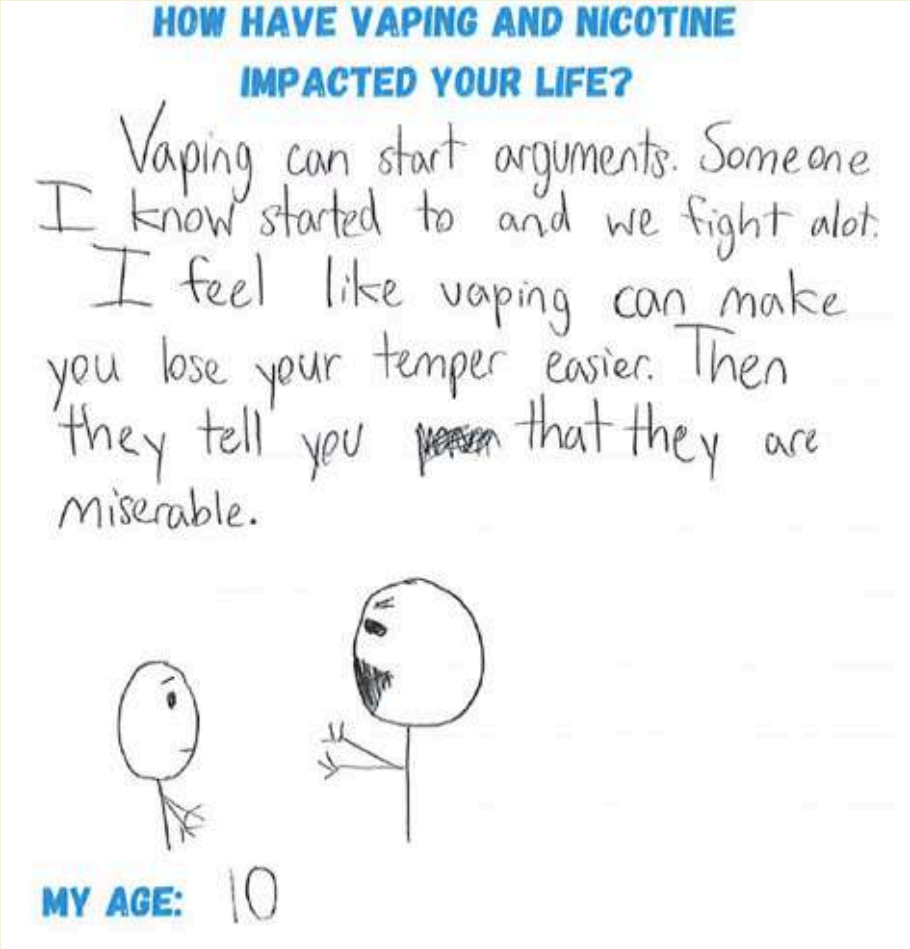
Many youth (20%) report facing peer pressure and dealing with vaping at school. They describe school bathrooms that smell like vape smoke and friends who try to get them to vape. They express frustration at both the peer pressure and the secondhand effects of others' vaping.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Secondary but Notable Patterns

1 Behavioral Changes

Youth report family members and friends becoming "cranky" and "different" when using nicotine.



HOW HAVE VAPING AND NICOTINE IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

Vaping can start arguments. Someone I know started to and we fight alot. I feel like vaping can make you lose your temper easier. Then they tell you ~~[illegible]~~ that they are miserable.

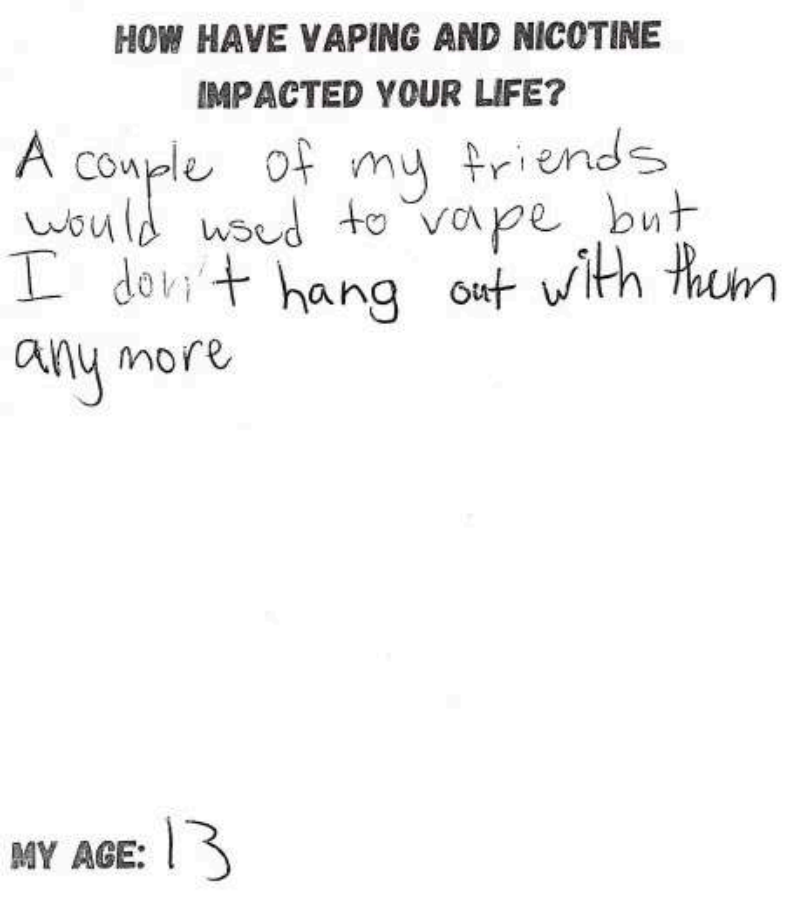
MY AGE: 10

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Secondary but Notable Patterns

2 Social Isolation

Some youth avoid friends who vape, limiting their social connections.



HOW HAVE VAPING AND NICOTINE IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

A couple of my friends would used to vape but I don't hang out with them any more

MY AGE: 13

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Secondary but Notable Patterns

3 Financial Impact

Youth observe families spending money on nicotine products even when finances are tight.

HOW HAVE VAPING AND NICOTINE IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

Both my parents smoked in the past. Now, they've stopped because of the second-hand smoke to their kids. They both vape, when we don't have money they still spend money on vapes. My friends vape, some of them vape around others and they often keep talking about it.

MY AGE: 13

CALL TO ACTION

The voices of these 102 young people paint a clear picture: nicotine is not just affecting individual users—it's impacting entire families and communities. The next few pages outline specific actions you can take today to help end the youth vaping epidemic.

Parents and Caregivers

- Create nicotine-free homes and vehicles
- Have honest, age-appropriate conversations with children about nicotine's risks
- Seek cessation support if you currently use nicotine products
- Help your child fill out the How to Quit Vaping Booklet
- Know the warning signs of nicotine use in youth
- Learn how Tobacco is Changing and is made to be easily concealed

Educators

- Implement comprehensive prevention education programs
- Provide support for students struggling with nicotine use
- Create safe spaces for students to have open discussions about vaping and its effects
- Offer the How to Quit Vaping Booklet to students who need support
- Engage parents through educational programming about youth nicotine trends

Resources can be found in the back of this report!

CALL TO ACTION

Decision-Makers

Local Level

- Support community coalitions working on tobacco prevention
- Consider smoke-free policies for public spaces, parks, and municipal buildings
- Provide resources for healthcare providers to screen for nicotine exposure in youth
- Offer support by sharing community education campaigns highlighting the impact on families
- Support mental health and substance abuse treatment programs that include nicotine cessation

Sate Level

- Help communities respond to the youth vaping crisis
- Prioritize youth vaping prevention, intervention an cessation programs
- Strengthen legislation to curb the availability and marketing of vaping products to minors

RESOURCES

And Contact Information

1 Parent and Guardian Resources

For resources on how to talk to your child about vaping, how to support them on their quit journey, and more scan this QR code or click here.

2 Cessation Resources

For cessation resources for you or your child scan this QR code or click here.

3 Curriculum Resources

For curriculum resources click here or scan this QR code.

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NWTFC initiatives are funded by the Commercial Tobacco Prevention and Treatment Program, Division of Public Health, Wisconsin Department of Health Services

NWTFC County Leads

The Northwoods Tobacco Free Coalition represents seven counties in the Northwoods region. Connect with your local lead to see how you can get involved in tobacco prevention efforts in your community.

Florence County

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