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Health Department Launches MySpace Campaign to Help Young New Yorkers Cope

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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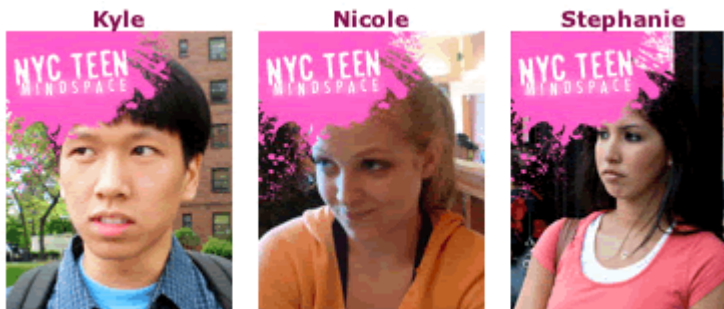
Teenage Visitors Encouraged to Seek Help for Depression, Drugs and Dating Violence

July 7, 2008 –The Health Department today announced a new online campaign to engage teenagers grappling with depression, drugs, and violence, and to encourage them to seek help. *NYC Teen Mindspace*, posted on MySpace, is the agency's first effort to promote health through Web-based social networking – a medium with great potential because of its popularity with young people. To see the campaign, visit www.myspace.com/nycteen_mindspace. (Link will appear in a new browser window.)



Mental health issues are common among teens. Nearly one-third of New York City high school students say they experience sadness that keeps them from daily activities (30%), and 8% report attempting suicide during the past year. In addition, some 11% say they experienced dating violence during the past year – up from 7% in 1999. About 15% of teens report binge drinking, and 12% say they smoke marijuana. (Both rates have fallen slightly in recent years.)

Though many teens experience mental health issues, they are often reluctant to acknowledge them and seek help. When asked who they are most likely to talk with when they feel sad, more than 20% of teens said they talk to no one, one-third said they would talk to a friend only (31%), and just one-third said they would talk to an adult (32%). The *Mindspace* page responds to these issues with interactive features that raise awareness and combat stigma



by helping teens identify with peers and prompting them to seek help.

- **Video blogs for teen characters.** *Mindspace* features fictional, composite personalities, such as “Kyle,” “Nicole,” and “Stephanie,” who chronicle their struggles through video posts. Their stories about using drugs or suffering from depression unfold through updates. Any teen who visits the site can “friend” the characters and follow their stories. Additional characters will be added in coming weeks.
- **Opportunities to reach out for help.** By sending a confidential message to a mental health counselor from LifeNet, a service offered by the Mental Health Association of New York City, teens can get help and referrals to treatment. *Mindspace* does not offer live assistance, but it encourages teens who need support to call 800-LifeNet – where counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week – or they can call 911 in an emergency.
- **Quizzes, polls, games, and fact sheets.** “Have you ever felt the need to harm yourself or others?” Teens can use questions like these to test their knowledge and compare their feelings with those of their peers. Fact sheets, quizzes, and games that focus on stress and abuse offer guidance and perspective – and they can be forwarded to friends.
- **Music downloads.** A standard piece of any popular page, this feature invites teens to express themselves by playing music to fit their moods.

“Social networking sites present a unique opportunity to help teenagers with mental health problems,” said Dr. David Rosin, Deputy Commissioner for Mental Hygiene. “By reaching out to young people where they socialize, in a style they can relate to, we make it easier for them to talk and seek help.”

Social networking has become a fact of teen life. Research from the Pew Research Center shows that 93% of U.S. teens use the Internet and 85% of them visit social networking sites, with half of them visiting their personal profiles daily to interact with a larger online community. These sites provide an opportunity not only to share information, but to shift social norms. Young people who visit *Mindspace* will see that the featured characters address their issues by talking to a counselor or calling LifeNet, and some will be inspired to reach out themselves.

“Many teens are reluctant to seek help,” said Dr. Myla Harrison, Assistant Commissioner for Child and Adolescent Services. “Engaging with these characters may help teens express their feelings, connect with others and realize that help is available. They may also realize that they don’t have to take risks and endanger themselves. Instead, they will see the characters think about how to direct their own lives in a safer, healthier way.”

The Health Department drew on data from the city’s biannual survey of public high school students in developing the focus areas for the campaign. The Department convened a teen advisory panel to guide the look and feel of the page and shape the profiles and experiences of the teen characters.

For more statistics about New York City teens, please see these reports:

Mental Health of New York City Youth:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2008youthmh.pdf>

Teen Safety in New York City:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2007teensafety.pdf>

Substance Use Among New York City Youth:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2007subsAbuse.pdf>

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