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## **Truth Initiative Launches Animated truth<sup>®</sup> Campaign: "Toxic Therapy from Your Vape" featuring Actor Chris Parnell to Address Alarming Connection between Vaping Nicotine and Youth Mental Health**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 2, 2023)** – In a bold move to address the alarming connection between vaping nicotine and youth mental health, Truth Initiative has launched its latest **truth<sup>®</sup>** campaign, "Toxic Therapy from Your Vape." The campaign features actor and comedian Chris Parnell in an animated role as a vape-turned-faux therapist, shedding light on the misconception that vaping nicotine helps alleviate stress and anxiety. When in fact, research shows [nicotine can intensify feelings](#) of anxiety and depression and increase levels of stress.

The "Toxic Therapy from Your Vape" campaign comprises five animated short videos including "[Texting Anxiety](#)", "[Hypnotherapy](#)," and "[Sleep Exercises](#)," each featuring the Toxic Therapist character (voiced by Parnell) impersonating a therapist offering unhealthy and detrimental advice during moments of stress. For example, when friends don't respond to text messages, the Toxic Therapist encourages individuals to jump to conclusions and believe their friends are excluding them. Similarly, when struggling to sleep due to past embarrassments, the Toxic Therapist advises individuals to dwell on these thoughts until sunrise, vividly illustrating how vaping nicotine can increase feelings of anxiety rather than help with coping.

"Many young people turn to vaping nicotine as a coping mechanism in moments of stress or anxiety, but the truth is that nicotine can often intensify those feelings. We wanted to make it clear to young people that vaping nicotine is—Toxic Therapy," explained Elizabeth Kenny, Chief Marketing and Strategy Officer, Truth Initiative. "We worked with Chris Parnell, a voice our audience knows from shows like Rick and Morty, to bring our animated vape-turned-faux therapist character to life in a way that felt informative, but funny and relatable."

As the colliding crises of youth e-cigarette use and mental health continue to plague our nation, "Toxic Therapy from Your Vape" provides vital information to guide teens and young adults away from vaping nicotine as a misguided coping mechanism. The campaign offers alternative resources for de-stressing and quitting e-cigarettes including the text-message program from **truth** 'This is Quitting,' which is already helping more than 640,000 young people on their journey to quit vaping nicotine. This animated campaign will reach youth audiences across multiple platforms, including connected TV, streaming TV and



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radio, cinema, digital and social media. It launches just ahead of World Mental Health Day on October 10<sup>th</sup>.

Additional content and collaborations will roll out throughout the fall including partnering with mental health social media influencers like [Jeff Guenther, LPC](#), [Micheline Maalouf, LMHC](#), and [Dr. Justin, PHD](#) to name a few. A new TikTok show from **truth**, [Everything Sucks Right Now](#), hosted by popular influencers [Vincent Marcus](#) and [Christian Vierling](#), is also addressing topics that are bothering young people right now like vaping, relationships, and the environment.

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, in honor of Stress Awareness Day, a Snapchat filter will extend the campaign enabling users to engage with the “Toxic Therapist” face-to-face digitally with a lens that creates a virtual “toxic therapy” session that drives to healthy coping solutions.

"Toxic Therapy from Your Vape" also highlights the detrimental impact of vaping nicotine on sleep which is vital for good mental health. Vaping nicotine is associated with sleep problems, including poor sleep quality, reduced sleep duration, restlessness during sleep, nightmares, and daytime sleepiness.

With over 2.5 million high school and middle school students vaping nicotine in 2022 alone, including 46 percent of high schoolers who vape doing so on a near-daily basis, youth e-cigarette use and nicotine addiction remain a national public health threat. Simultaneously, youth mental health is a pressing concern, declared a public health crisis by the U.S. Surgeon General in 2022. This new **truth** effort tackles these interconnected issues head-on, employing humor as an effective approach to inform and connect with young people while demonstrating the undeniable link between nicotine and mental health.

In 2021, **truth** unveiled a fictitious vape company called "Depression Stick!" that first exposed how vaping nicotine can intensify anxiety and depression. This was followed by "Breath of Stress Air" in 2022, debunking the myth that vaping nicotine is a stress reliever and exposing the tobacco industry's deceptive promotion of e-cigarettes as a stress management tool. "Toxic Therapy from Your Vape" builds upon these previous endeavors, as recent research published in the journal [Tobacco Control](#) validates their efficacy. Over a 14-month period, these campaigns prevented 1.3 million 15- to 24-year-olds from starting to vape, slowed the progression among existing e-cigarette users, and encouraged quitting overall, also earning **truth** the prestigious Grand Effie award in 2023 for the most effective behavior changing campaign of the year.



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Truth Initiative collaborated with creative agency partner Mojo Supermarket to develop “Toxic Therapy from Your Vape,” as a continuation of the “Depression Stick!” and “Breath of Fresh Air” **truth** campaigns. GALE is the media planning and buying agency for the **truth** campaign. We Are Social contributed to the social activations for “Toxic Therapy from Your Vape.”

While young people are not naïve to the physical risks of using e-cigarettes, over 50% of frequent vapers say they need to vape to cope with stress or anxiety. Research from Truth Initiative shows that an overwhelming [majority](#) of young people who vape started using e-cigarettes to reduce feelings of stress despite scientific evidence to the contrary. Fortunately, quitting can alleviate these symptoms and lead to long-term improved mental health. As evidenced by [Truth Initiative data](#), 90% of young people who quit vaping e-cigarettes said they felt less stressed, anxious, or depressed.

“We’re seeing a massive increase in the number of young people with mental health needs, and the system is overwhelmed,” said Susan Gurley, Executive Director of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. “That’s why the work **truth** is doing to connect with young people and reach them in relatable ways is so important. Anything we can do to get critical resources into the hands of young people is welcomed in addressing this crisis.”

An immersive experience on [thetruth.com/solutionspace](https://thetruth.com/solutionspace) will give young people access to relevant resources and added coping methods, including:

- [This is Quitting](#) from **truth**, which is a first-of-its-kind, free, and anonymous text message program to help young people quit vaping by texting **DITCHVAPE** to **88709**;
- [Breathwrk](#), which offers science-backed breathing and meditation exercises to reduce stress, sleep better, stay energized, or calm nicotine cravings;
- [Cope Notes](#), a text service which promotes daily mental health support, sends exercises, journal prompts, and facts;
- [Crisis Text Line](#), which offers 24/7 support from trained crisis counselors from a secure online platform by **texting HOME** to **741741** to get connected to professional support.

“An increasing number of young people are experiencing anxiety-causing thoughts and behaviors, and while many are open to discussing their mental health and breaking stigmas, more than half of young people aged 18-24 with anxiety or depression still do not seek treatment,” said Dr. Debra Kissen, CEO of



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Light On Anxiety CBT Treatment Center. “The **truth** campaign shines an important spotlight on the mental health state of young people in a way that resonates meaningfully with this younger generation and gives them tools to get help.”

More information about the campaign and additional resources for young people struggling with mental health or those who want to quit vaping nicotine is available at [thetruth.com/solutionspace](https://thetruth.com/solutionspace). Information about the connection between vaping nicotine, stress and mental health is available at [truthinitiative.org](https://truthinitiative.org).

#### **Additional quotes of support:**

“It’s clear that young people are struggling with their mental health and need outlets to voice their pain and share difficult feelings,” said Dr. Shairi Turner, Chief Health Officer at Crisis Text Line. “We want young people to know they have a place to turn for a listening ear and emotional support during their moments of need as we strive to create an empathetic world where no one feels alone. We believe partnering with the **truth** campaign is a critical component of our work.”

“Youth and young people are particularly vulnerable to early initiation of nicotine use, often turning to vaping as a way to heal from trauma or to cope with stress,” said Alexandra Plante, Senior Advisor of Substance Use at the National Council for Mental Wellbeing. “That’s why it’s so important to help young people understand the real effects of nicotine and withdrawal may be doing the opposite of what they are hoping for, and actually intensify feelings of anxiety and depression.”

“Many people who struggle with mental health challenges often suffer in silence. It’s critically important to build supportive communities where young people have easy access to mental health professionals as well as feel comfortable sharing difficult feelings,” said Shawn E. Boynes, CEO of the American Counseling Association. “Mental health is at the forefront of overall human wellness, so investing in young people’s mental wellbeing, and providing credible, yet practical expert resources to help them must be a priority. This is one way we can tackle the growing mental health crisis.”

**About truth®**



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**truth** is the longest-running proven effective national tobacco prevention campaign for youth and young adults. The campaign delivers the facts about tobacco use and the marketing tactics of the tobacco industry so that young people can make informed choices and influence others to do the same. We are credited with preventing millions of young people from becoming smokers and are committed to achieving the same results with the youth e-cigarette crisis. As part of this effort, our first-of-its-kind, text message quit vaping program for teens and young adults This is Quitting® has enrolled more than 640,000 young people nationwide since its launch in 2019. **truth** is part of Truth Initiative®, a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where young people reject smoking, vaping, and nicotine. Learn more about **truth** and the organization behind it at [thetruth.com](http://thetruth.com) and [truthinitiative.org](http://truthinitiative.org).

#### **About Truth Initiative®**

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where all young people reject smoking, vaping and nicotine and a future where commercial tobacco and nicotine addiction are a thing of the past. Our impact has helped drive youth smoking prevalence down from 23% in 2000 to a historic low of 2% in 2022. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign. As youth e-cigarette use threatens to put a new generation at risk, we are leading the fight against tobacco and nicotine addiction in all forms. Our first-of-its-kind, text message quit vaping program This Is Quitting has enrolled over 640,000 young people nationwide and our youth e-cigarette prevention curriculum *Vaping: Know the truth*® is being used in more than 9,000 schools nationwide. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco, and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment are also helping to end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. To learn more, visit [truthinitiative.org](http://truthinitiative.org).

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