
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, December, 2009

Time



I have noticed that during this time of year, we frequently talk about time. How many times have I said, "I cannot believe that the holidays are here already, time really flies."

And, of course, the celebration of the new year is totally about time. Most of us become reflective about the passing of another year. As we consider the coming year, many of us are inspired to think about ways that we can change our life for the better. This is also the time that many folks make resolutions that they hope will improve the quality of their life.

As I consider the issue, I am thinking about an initiative that New Rochelle FOCUS is doing during this holiday season about "time." They are putting a sign on kiosks at the train station that says; "There's no better present than the time spent with you children during this holiday season." I think that thought goes for the whole year.

All of the staff at SAS joins me in wishing you a happy holiday and new year.

Patricia Murphy Warble, LMSW, CPP

Home for the Holiday

Once again, it is that time of year that we often refer to as the "holidays." Just saying the word can elicit excitement, anticipation, joy and/or anxiety, dread, and worry. Most of us have certain expectations about the holidays and if they are met then the holidays are great and if they are not met, then the holidays are very disappointing.

Perhaps the first thing to consider when thinking about the holidays is to lower expectations about this emotionally charged time of year. There is a saying in the twelve step movement "such as Alcoholics Anonymous" that the greatest threat to serenity is expectations. Expectations, which at times can often be unrealistic and impractical, can set us up for disappointment and frustration. Some other twelve step slogans may be a better way to proceed through the holiday time, "what is, is" and proceed "one day at a time."

Last year the holiday season was shadowed by a sense of foreboding about the future but this year the energy is a little more positive and optimistic. If there are two themes to identify and to celebrate from the past year as the holidays approach, they are "we are still here" and "we are grateful."

Keeping that uppermost in our mind during this short period of time as we meet the challenges like shopping, entertaining and attending special holiday events and concerts. The true meaning of the holidays may be different for families depending on their beliefs and values. However, the holidays usually include the celebration of a religious belief but whether religious based or not, the holiday period also includes being thankful and appreciating the gift of family and friends.

So keeping the focus on gratitude and appreciation rather than on the presents and getting more things can go a long way to maintaining a good balance about what is important during this season. The simple things in life are usually the most profound. Spending time with family and friends, volunteering, and sharing a meal provides memories that last a lifetime, much longer than a present may be remembered.

Protecting Your Children During the Holidays

During the holiday season adults and children are frequently attending the same functions and alcohol is often readily available at these gatherings. When children are seeing adults consuming a significant amount of alcohol as part of holiday celebrations or driving under the influence they may think that it is okay for them to drink or to drink and drive too.

These intergenerational gatherings can be wonderful but this type of setting may provide teenagers with opportunities to drink alcohol without anyone noticing. There could be an inexperienced person serving drinks, alcohol may be put out and be readily available with no one monitoring who is drinking it, and during parties it may be difficult for parents to supervise their children.

To offset the impact of this reality, parents can be pro-active in terms of keeping their own children safe and healthy during the holiday period. First and foremost, be a good role model for your children. Modeling good behavior is worth a thousand words. It is hard to get across a message of appropriateness and moderation if your own choices around alcohol are unhealthy.

Talk to your children about the risk of alcohol abuse during the holidays. Discuss the realities that even though there are more parties and celebrations, it is still important for adults to be responsible. Also talk about the fact that the holidays can be a difficult time for some people and that they may look to alcohol help them socialize or as a way to deal with unhappiness and depression. Brainstorm with them better and healthier ways to deal with these issues and point out that alcohol is a depressant and that it can actually aggravate these conditions.

Set clear a clear and consistent “no use” messages about drugs and alcohol. In particular, let your children know that just because it is the holiday time and many of the adults around them are drinking, it is your expectation that they do not drink.

In addition to these suggestions, there are additional things that parents can do to keep your adolescents healthy during the holiday period.

- Begin by making sure that your children are in a safe and chaperoned environment. This can be difficult for parents who work. Perhaps a cooperative initiative with other families where everyone takes off one day to supervise a group of teens is one solution. It may take some resourcefulness to provide supervision but it is worth the effort. When teens are “home alone” they are more likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol and engage in other risky behaviors.
- Don’t give lottery tickets or gifts that promote gambling. Research

has demonstrated a correlation between teen gambling and substance abuse.

- Last month a “Contract for Life” was printed in this newsletter. It can also be obtained on the Internet at www.madd.org. This contract is between a parent and teen and states that parents agree to pick up a teen who needs a safe ride home with no questions asked. The goal is to keep children safe for the moment and other concerns can be dealt with at a later date. Have a discussion with your children about this contract and both sign it.
- Discuss the dangers of drinking, using other drugs, texting and driving with your teen. It may help to do it in the context of the “contract for life.” In addition, let your child know that under no circumstances should they get into a car with someone else who has been drinking or using drugs.
- Be sure that your teen knows the signs and symptoms of alcohol poisoning. Be clear about your expectations if your child is in a situation where someone may be passed out from drug and alcohol use. Make sure that your child understands the need for immediate adult intervention into this serious situation. Calling 911 is usually the best way to proceed so that the child gets immediate medical attention.
- Have a “code” phrase that your child can say to you over the cell phone that translates into “come get me, there are things going on that make me uncomfortable.” For instance, your child might ask, “what time is granny coming tomorrow?”

- Be aware that prescription and over-the-counter drugs might be available at the homes of friends and families that you visit over the holiday period.
- There is great concern about the explosion in the use of over-the-counter cold medications and prescription drugs by teens. Many teens are getting these medications from their own homes or from the homes of their families and friends. Often grandparents are on medications that can be very tempting to teens. Alert all family and friends who are having a party or having teens to their home to lock up their medications in a secure and safe place.
- It helps to deal with the challenges of the holiday season by eating properly, exercising, and getting enough sleep. Getting enough sleep also keeps everyone in the family in a better mood. When family members are overtired, things can seem overwhelming. Daily exercise is also very helpful. If all else fails, a short walk can do wonders to improve the mood. Healthy eating, sleeping, and exercising goes a long way to help keep everyone and everything in perspective.
- Monitor the time your children spends interacting with technology. Don't allow your children to spend hours on the computer surfing the Internet and playing video games.

Tips for Parents: Hosting Holiday Parties

These tips are part of Student Assistance Services' efforts to raise the level of awareness concerning the use of alcohol and other drugs during the holiday season.

1. Know the law. It is illegal to give or sell any alcoholic beverage to a person under age 21, unless you are that person's parent or guardian.
2. An adult, or parent, who serves alcohol to persons under age 21 can be held responsible for injuries or damages caused by that minor's intoxication.
3. Under Westchester's new Social Host law, anyone over 21 can be charged for allowing alcohol to be consumed in their home by individuals under 21.
4. A teen, 16 years of age or older, can be criminally charged with a variety of crimes for providing alcohol or other drugs to another teen, even if no money is exchanged.
5. Set the ground rules before the party:
 - Agree on the guest list and send out invitations
 - Only those invited will be allowed to attend
 - All guests enter from one entrance
 - Notify police about the party date and time
 - Notify neighbors
 - Coats and bags will be "checked in"
 - The party will be alcohol and drug free. (Do not assume your child knows this). Any guest who tries to bring alcohol or other drugs, arrives under the influence, or drinks alcohol or uses other drugs at the party will be asked to leave and their parents will be called so they can get home safely.
6. Remove all prescription and over-the-counter medications from any bathroom that will be used by guests.
7. To ensure safety of all guests a parent must be frequently visible and present to supervise. Invite parents of your child's friends to help chaperone.
8. Patrol in and outside your house, monitor the garage, windowsills and bedrooms

Holiday Gift Suggestions

Anthony Wolf, Ph.D.

- *The Secret of Parenting*
- *Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?*
- *Why Did You Have To Get A Divorce?*

Kuhn, Schwartzwelder, and Wilson

- *Buzzed*
- *Just Say Know*

David J. Wilmes

- *Parenting for Prevention*

Rachel Simmons

- *Odd Girl Out*

Ron Taffel

- *The Second Family: How Adolescent Power is Changing the American Family*

Debra Haffner

- *Beyond The Big Talk*
- *From Diapers to Dating*
- *What Every 21st Century Parent Needs To Know*

Dan Kindlon

- *Too Much Of A Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in An Indulgent Age*
- *Raising Cain*

Rosalind Wiseman

- *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence*
- *Queen Bee Moms & Kingpin Dads: Dealing with the Parents, Teachers, Coaches, and Counselors Who Can Make--or Break--Your Child's Future*

Michael Bradley, Ph.D.

- *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy!: Loving Your Kid Without Losing Your Mind*
- *Yes, Your Parents Are Crazy!: A Teen Survival Handbook*

Madelyn Levine, Ph.D.

- *The Price of Privilege*

Joseph Califano, Jr

- *How to Raise a Drug-Free Kid*



During the holidays there are resources available for anyone in need of information, advice, reassurance, referral or other help about alcohol, drug use and gambling.

1-877-8HOPE NY

This is hotline is in operation 24/7 and is available in English and Spanish. A trained addictions specialist is available to provide confidential information related to alcohol, gambling and other drugs.

914-949-1200

**Alcoholics Anonymous
A list of meeting times and places is available by calling this number.**