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# Parenting for Prevention

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Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, June, 2008

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## Positive Prevention



I am looking forward to the summer but as I reflect back over the school year, I think that the

Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth has had a particularly successful year. Most of the members of this group attended the monthly meetings where they learned about new and interesting initiatives, shared valuable information, and networked with one another. As a result, many community coalitions became stronger and more effective.

The Teen Drinking Action Council had an amazing group of spirited students who finished a very successful year by making a Public Service Announcement. The Public Service Announcement illustrates their commitment to a drug-free lifestyle which will be shown on local stations during the summer.

Finally, the support and commitment of County Executive Andy Spano and District Attorney Janet Difiore to the youth of this county has added a further dimension to the work of coalitions. Their involvement enhances our work.

The staff at Student Assistance Services wishes you all a safe and happy summer. Our thanks to everyone who has worked to prevent substance abuse throughout the year to make Westchester County a safer place. We look forward to next year and further success. We invite you all to join us in that effort!

*Patricia Murphy Warble, Editor*

## Another Challenge To Keep Teens Safe

Every year the June edition of this newsletter discusses issues related to keeping children safe during the summer months. This year there are new challenges to keeping children healthy and safe. Both anecdotal reporting and research show that there is a troubling increase in the use of over-the-counter and prescription drugs by teens.

According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA), in 2006 more than 2.1 million teens abused prescription drugs. Abusing these drugs can lead to addiction. Between 1995 and 2005 treatment admissions for abuse of prescription painkillers grew more than 300 percent. As more teens across the country are entering substance abuse treatment, they report taking these drugs because they are easy to access at home and other places and can be cheaper than street drugs.

**A recent article in *The Journal News* reports that hospitalizations in Westchester for cold medicine overdoses have quadrupled since 2000 among 13- to 19-year-olds, according to data from the Regional Poison and Drug Information Center, which fields voluntary calls from hospitals.**

Many members of the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Youth traveled to Washington, DC in February to attend the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) conference where concerns about both prescription and over-the-counter drug use were highlighted in key-note presentations and in workshops. Recently, members of law enforcement asked the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Youth if they could provide a training for officers about prescription and over-the-counter drugs. Police officers were reporting that they were finding these substances in the cars and in the possession of teens in our county. As a result of this request, thirty-five members of law enforcement attended a training on this topic in April.

In Westchester County, emergency room personnel are also reporting that they are seeing an increase in visits by teens who have taken prescription and over-the-counter drugs. A recent article in *The Journal News* reports that hospitalizations in Westchester for cold medicine overdoses have quadrupled since 2000 among 13- to 19-year-olds, according to data from the Regional Poison and Drug Information Center which fields voluntary calls from hospitals.

Here are recommendations about over-the-counter and prescription drugs that come from the [www.antidrug.com](http://www.antidrug.com) website.

**#1 Safeguard all drugs at home. Monitor quantities and control access.**

Take note of how many pills are in a bottle or pill packet, and keep track of refills. This goes for your own medication, as well as for your teen and other members of your household. If you find you have to refill medication more often than expected, there could be a real problem—someone may be taking your medication without your knowledge. If your teen has been prescribed a drug, be sure you control the medication, and monitor dosages and refills. Think about your home. What prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs do you have? Where are they kept? Would you know if some were missing? The good news is that you can take steps immediately to limit access to these drugs and help keep your teen drug-free.



**#2 Set clear rules for teens about all drug use, including not sharing medicine and always following the medical provider's advice and dosages.**

Make sure your teen uses prescription drugs only as directed by a medical provider and follows instructions for OTC products carefully. This includes taking the proper dosage and not using with other substances without a medical provider's approval. Teens should never take prescription or OTC drugs with street drugs or alcohol.

If you have any questions about how to take a drug, call your family physician or pharmacist.

**#3 Be a good role model by following these same rules with your own medicines.**

Examine your own behavior to ensure you set a good example. If you misuse your prescription drugs, such as share them with your kids, or abuse them, your teen will take notice. Avoid sharing your drugs and always follow your medical provider's instructions.



**#4 Properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medicines in the trash.**

Unused prescription drugs should be hidden and thrown away in the trash. So that teens or others don't take them out of the trash, you can mix them with an undesirable substance (like used coffee grounds or kitty litter) and put the mixture in an empty can or bag. Unless the directions say otherwise, do NOT flush medications down the

drain or toilet because the chemicals can pollute the water supply. Also, remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away.

**#5 Ask friends and family to safeguard their prescription drugs as well.**

Make sure your friends and relatives, especially grandparents, know about the risks, too, and encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets. If there are other households your teen has access to, talk to those families as well about the importance of safeguarding medications. If you don't know the parents of your child's friends, then make an effort to get to know them, and get on the same page about rules and expectations for use of all drugs, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Follow up with your teen's school administration to find out what they are doing to address issues of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse. Talk to your teen about the dangers of abusing prescription and over-the-counter drugs. These are powerful drugs that, when used without a prescription or in a way that is not directed, can be even more dangerous than street drugs. Tell your teen the risks far outweigh any benefits."

To learn more about prescription and over-the-counter drug risks, visit [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com).

**Poison Control  
1-800-222-1222**

## More On Summer Safety

### *Warm Weather Risks*

The lack of structure, more leisure time, transitions, and more opportunities to be in unsupervised settings can make the summer a challenging time for students and their parents. A good way to start the summer is to have a discussion with your teen so that you can get on the same page in terms of expectations, curfews, and values. The research from the Columbia University Center for Addictions and Substance Abuse (CASA) reminds parents that they can have a very positive impact on the life-style decisions that children make. Parents may not feel that their teens are listening to them, but the research shows that they are!

Usually the most successful strategy is for parents and teens to set some rules together so both know what is acceptable and what is not. In addition, parents and teens should agree on what constitutes a dangerous situation and how to handle it. It is also helpful if the conversation with your teens includes role-playing possible scenarios which they could encounter during the summer. Teens do not sequence events from beginning to end as well as adults do, and acting out scenarios can help your children think about ways to handle an uncomfortable or dangerous situation.

One of the issues that needs to be addressed is using marijuana. According to the website of the White House of National Drug Control Policy, [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com), **40% more teens try marijuana during the summer than at any other time of the year.** The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign makes the following recommendations to help parents reduce the risk of their children trying marijuana.

- Talk to your teen about the harmful physical, mental, and social effects of using marijuana. Young people who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are 50% less likely to try drugs than their peers who learn nothing from their parents.
- Set limits about marijuana use with clear consequences for breaking them. Two-thirds of teens say that upsetting their parents is one of the main reasons they do not use drugs.

The following are other issues that should be discussed at the start of summer:

- The use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Dealing with sexual pressures.
- Peer pressure to participate in risky behaviors.
- Drinking or drugging and driving or being a passenger.

In addition to these discussions, the following strategies are also helpful to protect your teen:

- Monitor the activities of your teen. Teens not regularly monitored are four times more likely to use drugs.
- Be involved in your teen's life. Stay in touch with coaches, teachers, camp counselors and other adults who interact with your child. Ask them to inform you if they see any changes in your teen.
- Make sure your teen has some structure in the summer schedule. Research shows that teens who are involved in constructive and adult-supervised activities are less likely to try drugs.
- Make sure that family time is built into the summer schedule. It can be as simple as food shopping together, taking a walk, sharing a meal or going to the movies together.
- Make a plan to deal with an emergency situation. Agree on a "code" phrase that a teen can use on a phone call to parents. For instance, "I'm sorry I forgot to clean before I went out. I'll come home now. Meet me at \_\_\_\_\_." This really means, I am in an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation.
- Set up a system to maintain good communication. An effective way to keep in touch with children in an unobtrusive way is to text message them. Text messaging allows communication that is private and not overheard by

children's friends. Text messaging also enables children to give their parents accurate information while protecting them from negative comments from friends.

- Teens often meet and make new friends over the summer or at camp, internships or jobs. Ask about new friends.
- To check your child's whereabouts, ask them to take a picture of their location.
- Tell your teens that if they are concerned about someone who has taken a prescription drug, an over-the-counter drug, excessive amounts of alcohol or other drugs, they should call poison control which is available 24/7, 1-800-222-1212 or call 911.

Finally, enjoy the summer. This is a precious time to build wonderful family relationships that children remember for a lifetime. The greatest gift that parents can give to their children is spending time with them. . Share a meal, take a walk, or camp out in the backyard. Take an ordinary event and make it special. Be resourceful, children remember those moments forever.

## **Family Day, A Day To Eat Dinner With Your Family** *September 22*

More than a decade's worth of research by CASA finds that the more often children eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. The conversations that go hand-in-hand with dinner will help you learn more about your children's lives and better understand the challenges they face.

As a result of this research CASA has started a national effort, *Family Day*, to promote family dinners as an effective way to reduce substance abuse among children and teens. This year *Family Day* will be celebrated on Monday, September 22. As in past years, the Westchester County Office of Drug Prevention and STOP-DWI will have *Family Day* materials available for distribution to communities. Plan now to celebrate this important initiative. It is a great coalition project to start off the 2008-2009 school year. Call Pat Tomassi at 914-995-4115 to order materials for your community.

There are also many valuable *Family Day* resources on the CASA website, [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org). It is worthwhile visiting the website, there are many things there to help you plan activities for *Family Day*.

