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# Parenting for Prevention

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

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## The Holidays Are Here



Once again, the holidays have arrived. Given the realities of this year, it will probably not be such a hectic, busy holiday season as in years past.

As I was thinking about this holiday season I was thinking about the words “presents” and “presence.” And the fact that although “presents” are nice to receive, isn’t it our “presence” with another person or our family that is much more important? Perhaps being “present” rather than giving a lot of “presents” should be our guideline for celebrating the holidays this year.

Whether we are talking about a friend or our family the true meaning of the holidays is that we should appreciate and be thankful for those people who play meaningful roles in our lives. And the best way to show that appreciation is make every effort to be “present” to them. Children tell us that they wish their parents would spend more time with them. That is a gift we can all give this holiday season.

*Patricia Murphy Warble, Editor*

## Pressure Cooker *Students Report Why They Feel Stress*

Last month this newsletter briefly discussed the reasons that teens say they drink and use other drugs. According to the 2008 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, 73% of teens in grades 7 to 12 believe that “kids use drugs to deal with the pressures and stress of school.” But what do students mean when they say that?

According to Parent. The AntiDrug website ([theantidrug.com](http://theantidrug.com)), the pressures that children experience are not just pressures to succeed academically but there are many other challenges that students experience within their environment that make them vulnerable to drug and alcohol use.

**For many children today, fitting in means having not just the “cool” jeans but all the right clothes, shopping in the right stores, using the right cell phone, having the right friends, hanging out in the right places and sharing the same interests. And the price for not achieving all these “shoulds” is to be ostracized by the group.**

- **The Pressure to Fit In**

Everyone wants to be accepted and fit in, but the teens of today say they feel an urgency to fit in and be part of the group. That ability to fit in is more encompassing in terms of it impacting more aspects of a teen’s life and as a result, the stakes are high. Previously, fitting in might have meant having the “cool jeans.” For many of today’s children, fitting in means having not just the “cool” jeans but all the right clothes, shopping in the right stores, using the right cell phone, having the right friends, hanging out in the right places and sharing the same interests. And the price for not achieving all these “shoulds” is to be ostracized by the group. There is much less room for any variance from what the group determines as the norm to fit in. And in some cases, fitting in means that a teen may use drugs and alcohol in order to be part of the group. Conversely, if teens are not part of a group and don’t feel like they fit in, they may be more likely to use alcohol and drugs to medicate their feelings of sadness, depression, and rejection.

- **The Pressure To Be Sexually Active**

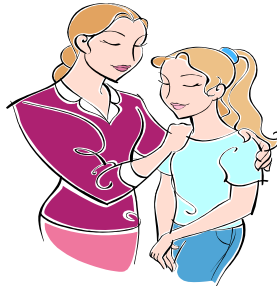
In the past twenty years there has been a normalization of behaviors that were once reserved for adults. The popular culture which includes advertisements, movies, television, music, magazines and other media outlets has created an environment that encourages teens to be “sexy” and sexually active. One indication of this change is to consider the clothes that many young women now wear to school. It is common today to see many young women wearing sexy, provocative and very revealing clothes that would be considered unacceptable twenty years or even ten years ago.

- **The Pressure To Be Successful**

This is not a surprise. Teens feel the pressure to succeed in all aspects of their high school experience. Teens believe that they must excel in sports, academics and their extracurricular and volunteer activities in order to be competitive for the best schools. Many teens report that they feel pressure from their parents to succeed and this stress may lead teens to use drugs and alcohol as a way to escape from their pressured lives.

## What Is Your Parenting Style?

No one has all the answers when it comes to raising safe and healthy teens who are prepared to succeed in the world. But research does show that certain approaches to parenting can often make a difference. Grandparents and other non-traditional caregivers can also benefit from better understanding, communicating and connecting with the teen in their lives.



The website [www.antidrug.com](http://www.antidrug.com) has an interesting quiz that parents and caregivers can take that will help determine your parenting style and learn more about what you're doing right, and what you could do better. It is helpful to go to the website and take the quiz. The possible answers that they present are food for thought.

Go to [www.westchesterda.net](http://www.westchesterda.net) for an informative DVD and parenting guide about talking to your teen about alcohol and other drug use. The DVD can be downloaded to your computer.

## Realities

There was a recent article on the website [www.antidrug.com](http://www.antidrug.com) that discussed some research-based information about what the reality is of what is going on in your teen's daily life.

### Facebook or Textbook?

A 2007 poll done by The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, showed that 46 percent of mothers say that their children are using the computer for school but the poll shows that their children are chatting on Facebook or MySpace.

### Advice for parents:

Parents should keep tabs on their children's use of the computer and periodically check to see what they are looking at online. In addition to the popular networking sites that teens spend time on connecting with their friends, there are also sites related to the promotion and justification of alcohol and other drug use among teens. In addition, there are sites where teens can actually buy drugs if they have access to a credit card.

### After School

The hours between 3:00 and 6:00 are prime time for teens to experiment with drugs, alcohol and other risky behaviors.

### Advice for parents:

Know where your children are after school and keep track of their plans and activities. It also helps parents if they get to know their children's friends and their parents. Make sure your teen knows

what the rules are in terms of who they can be with and where they can go. Also, make sure that they know there will be consequences if the rules are not followed. Encourage your child to get involved in activities after school rather than just hanging out.

### **Sleepover Sneak-out**

Sleepovers have the potential for problems. Although you may be home when your teen has a sleepover, teens are known to sneak out of the house once parents are asleep. Also, teens may go to a sleepover and do the same thing at someone else's home or engage in other activities at a friend's house that would not be permitted in their own home. For instance, watching an R rated movie, experimenting with drugs and alcohol or engaging in other risky behaviors.

### **Advice for parents:**

Have firm rules about sleepovers. Make sure that your children are where they are supposed to be and call them on a land line phone during the evening.

### **Hidden Friendships**

Make every effort to get to know your children's friends. It is also beneficial to get to know their parents in terms of forming a network in order to keep tabs on all of your children. If your children are not telling you anything about their friends, it is usually because they know you would disapprove of them for some reason.

### **Advice for parents:**

If you are worried about a friend that your child has made, talk to your child about your concerns. Parents need to be resourceful about finding ways to discourage a friendship that you think may impact your child in a negative way. Contacting a counselor at the school might also be helpful.

## **Starting the Conversation**

Over and over again, this newsletter discusses the importance of parents talking to their children about their concerns. However that is easier said than done.

Research shows that it is very important for parents to talk to their children about drugs and alcohol and other issues that concern them. Research by Columbia University's Center for Addictions and Substance Abuse (CASA) and PRIDE documents the importance of parents communicating their values about alcohol and drug use and other risky behaviors to their children.

Although teens may appear to resent their parent's intrusion into their lives, most teens report that it is comforting when parents present a framework with expectations for their teen's behavior. Also, when parents present their concerns and expectations to their teens, the underlying message that the teen gets is that their parents love and care for them.

The [www.antidrug.com](http://www.antidrug.com) website provides the following advice to parents about talking to their

children about difficult topics like drug or alcohol use or other risky behaviors.

### **The issue won't go away until you do something.**

Parents are intuitive and if a parent has a continuous nagging feeling, then acknowledge the possibility that your child has a problem and start to do something about it. In most situations, the problem won't get any better until a parent takes some action. And if needed seek professional advice to help deal with the problem. In fact, getting help may make it easier for a parent to have the conversation about their concerns. Call the Student Assistance Services helpline, 591-HELP if you need input from a licensed professional. All calls are confidential and can be anonymous.

### **Work with your spouse, partner or parent of the child before you speak to your child.**

Sometimes the beginning of a conversation is harder than the middle. It can be very difficult to speak with your spouse, partner or parent of the child when you suspect that your child has a problem with drugs or alcohol. That can be an uncomfortable conversation and is often laden with sadness, anger and regret. Denial and finger pointing can play a big part in that first conversation, and neither reaction is helpful. The most important thing parents can do is move on and figure out what is the best way to help your child.

This is a time for you and your spouse, partner or parent of the

teen to establish rules and consequences for your teen if he or she uses drugs or alcohol. The rules should be simple, no drug or alcohol use by teens will be allowed in your family. Be sure to provide a clear explanation about why you do not want your teen to use and a discussion about the circumstances related to the alcohol/drug use and how your teen could have chosen a different way of handling the situation. Consequences should include restrictions that are immediate, very time limited and meaningful to the teen. Don't go to extremes in setting consequences, choose those that you are able to carry out such as no cell phone for the day.

**Practice the conversation ahead of time.**

Role playing your remarks and possible responses will help you anticipate and practice for possible outcomes. These conversations are not easy but they are worthwhile and role playing the conversation ahead of time will help keep everyone calm and focused on the issue at hand.

**Make an agreement with yourself to stay in control.**

Make it a priority to stay calm as anger and hostility won't get you anywhere in this conversation. Start the talk by telling your child that you love him/her. Remember, that as the parent you are in charge. Be kind, respectful, simple, and direct in your statements and do not set up unreasonable expectations about the discussion.

**Here are some suggestions from [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com) website to keep in mind when you talk to a child that you may think is experimenting with drugs or alcohol.**

- Tell your child that you love him, and you are worried that he is using drugs or alcohol;
- You understand that drinking & drugs may seem like the thing to do, but using substances can have serious consequences;
- It makes you feel worried and concerned about the possibility that she is using drugs or alcohol;
- You are here to listen;
- You want him to be a part of the solution;
- Tell her what you will do to help;
- Tell him that you will have this discussion many, many times. Talking to your children about drugs and alcohol is not a one-time event.

**Upcoming Events**

**Jan 8** **6:30pm**  
Saunders High School Library  
Parenting Teens in Stressful Times  
Ellen Morehouse, LCSW  
Contact: 376-8150

**Jan 13** **7:00pm**  
French American School  
Teens. Parents, Alcohol, Drugs And the Law  
Westchester DA Janet DiFiore  
Contact: Helaine Couty, 250-0420.

**Jan 22** **7:30pm**  
White Plains High School Library  
ROADD TRIP  
Contact: 422-2196

**Jan 23** **9:30am**  
Bedford Historical Hall  
Strong Marriages Build Strong Families  
Suzanne Burger, PhD  
Contact: 234-3227

**Jan 30** **9:30am**  
Bedford Historical Hall  
Parenting in the 21st Century  
Debra Haffner  
Contact: 234-3227