
Parenting for Prevention

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

Westchester County Supports Prevention Efforts



During the summer, County officials engaged in several activities to prevent and reduce youth substance abuse. Westchester County

passed two laws that support prevention efforts to deal with underage drinking and drug use. The first that was passed is the “Social Host Law.” The goal of this law is to hold adults responsible if they are present when a party, gathering or event takes place at their home where minors are present and drinking alcohol.

The second deals with concerns about the increased use of over-the-counter medications by young people. The law restricts the sale of products that contain dextromethorphan (DXM) to minors under the age of 18.

In addition, Westchester County DA, Janet DiFiore in association with the Natural Road Safety Foundation and Student Assistance Services has produced a DVD for parents of ninth graders about preventing alcohol and drug use.

Our County Board of Legislators, County Executive and District Attorney have all shown outstanding leadership in the arena of underage alcohol and drug use through these as well as many other activities.

Editor: Patricia Murphy Warble

Don't Be Clueless

The Realities of the Teen “Scene”

A refrain that has been repeated over and over again by students is that their parents are “clueless.” As this school year begins, this newsletter is going to deal with some of the realities of a teenager’s life and try to help parents not be clueless.

Why do teens use 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.” Other reasons mentioned by the teens were to help them feel better about themselves (65%), to look cool (65%), to deal with problems at home (55%) and to improve athletic performance (54%). The least cited reasons for teen drug use were to have fun (26%) and to help study better (20%).

Where do young people drink?

According to the August, 2008 newsletter of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, a majority, 53.4 percent, of current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 drank at someone else’s home the last time they used alcohol, and another 30.3 percent drank in their own homes. In addition, 10 percent of 13-year old drinkers consumes alcohol in public places such as a park, a beach or a parking lot.

Where do teens get alcohol?

Sixty-five percent of underage youth who drink reported obtaining alcohol from family and friends.

Are there gender differences in substance abuse?

The 2007 Monitoring the Future report found that in general, males have somewhat higher rates of illicit drug use than females and much higher rates of smokeless tobacco and steroid use. Males also have higher rates of heavy drinking. However, in their 30-day prevalence use of alcohol at 8th grade, the girls overtook the boys in 2002 and have had higher rates since. At 10th grade girls overtook boys in 2005 and have remained equivalent since.

In a July 2002 research report entitled *Women and Addiction: Gender Issues in Abuse and Treatment* determined that once girls start to drink, their rate of addiction is higher and they experience resulting medical problems sooner.

Do age-related changes in drinking locations differ for males and females?

Among male alcohol users, the percentage reporting that they drank most recently in a car or other vehicle did not differ significantly by age between ages 15 and 20, but it did differ for females. An estimated 12.8 percent of 16 year old female alcohol users last drank alcohol in a car or other motor vehicle, a rate that was 8 times greater than the rate for female drinkers who were aged 20 (1.6 percent). At age 16, 7.3 percent of male current drinkers had their last drink in a car or other vehicle.

Among 15-year-old drinkers, females were twice as likely as males to have last used alcohol in a public place, such as a park, beach, or parking lot (10.6 vs. 5.0 percent). Among males, alcohol consumption in public places peaked at age 16 and then declined. Among females, alcohol consumption in public places declined after age 15.

The proportion of underage current drinkers who consumed their last alcohol in a restaurant, bar, or club generally increased with age. Starting at age 17, female drinkers were more likely than their male counterparts to have consumed alcohol in one of these locations.

Among 20-year-old current drinkers, 20 percent of females drank in a restaurant, bar, or club the last time they used alcohol compared with 10.2 percent of males.

Where do teens get marijuana?

According to Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, teens who had used marijuana in the past year, 58.3% obtained their most recently used marijuana for free or shared someone else's and 40% bought their own marijuana.

Teens who were daily marijuana users were more likely than non-daily marijuana users to have bought their most recently used marijuana (75.3% vs. 33.8%).

Are Westchester teens using prescription drugs or over-the-counter drugs?

Yes, many school districts are reporting that they are concerned about a rise in prescription or over-the-counter drug use by students.

According to a January, 2008 report from the Office of National Drug Control Policy, more young people ages, 12-17, abuse prescription drugs than any other illicit drug except marijuana.

When used as prescribed, prescription painkillers can be tremendously beneficial, said John Walters, director of the National Drug Control policy. "But their abuse is becoming a serious public health and addiction problem. We may be unintentionally providing our teens a new way to get high.... We need parents to recognize that not all drug threats to

their teens come from the street. Prescription drugs are in practically every home and parents can have an immediate impact on stopping teen prescription drug abuse."

Prescription drugs are easily accessible from parents and from other students. It's common practice for some teens to take prescription drugs and they really don't know what they are getting into when they are taking pills. In addition, teens may take the pills randomly and in combination with other drugs which can be very dangerous" said Walters.

Tranquilizers, painkillers, and stimulants are what teens typically abuse. Many teens mistakenly think that taking prescription drugs is safer than other drugs and disregard the risk of a lethal interaction or overdose. This is especially true for students who are taking a prescription for asthma or other medical conditions.

Another source of concern is the use of over-the-counter cough and cold products that contain Dextromethorphan, (DXM) which in the right quantity, can cause an adolescent to get high. Recently the Westchester County Legislators passed a law that prevents anyone under 18 from purchasing a product containing DXM but of course, it is also available in most home medicine cabinets. Many parents are not aware of the dangers of this substance and the fact that adolescents may be using cough and cold medications to get high.

What is the “big deal” about teens using alcohol?

Having a first drink of alcohol before age 15 significantly raises the risk for later development of alcohol-use disorders compared with someone who waits until age 18, according to new research published in the December issue of the *Journal of Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*,

The link between early drinking and later problems is not new. By following 22,316 drinkers over three years researchers were able to zero in on the ages at risk.

They also were able to report that the association between age of first drink and alcohol-use disorders in adulthood remained clear even after statistically adjusting for family histories, personality disorders and childhood risk factors.

The study does not prove that drinking before age 15 *causes* problems as an adult, but it increases the risk. "Early alcohol consumption itself, as a misguided choice or decision, is driving the relationship between early drinking and risk for development of later alcohol problems," Howard B. Moss, said an associate director at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Implications for Parents

Now that you have this knowledge, what should you do with it? It is very important for parents to be vigilant and aware. Based on the information in this newsletter, the following strategies could be very helpful.

- Some students say that they drink in their own homes or the homes of their friends. Get to know your children's friends and their parents. Call parents when any gathering is planned and make sure that they are going to be home and willing to supervise the young people.
 - Some teens say they get alcohol at their homes so make sure your alcohol is locked up and unavailable.
 - Realize that our daughters need supervision and accountability. Girls are drinking and smoking as much as boys and their hormones, size and other variables put them at greater risk for addiction.
 - Another risk factor for teen girls is dating a young man who is more than two years older than her. Dating an older male may expose her to an increased availability of alcohol and other drugs.
 - Many teens report that they drink in cars. Discuss the dangers of drinking and driving with your children. It is not a conversation that you just have once. Your concerns need to be expressed over and over again. Always take advantage of the “teachable moment.”
 - Hospital emergency departments and counselors in schools are concerned about prescription and over-the-counter drug use by teens in our area. Lock up medicine, throw out unused medicines, and keep a count of any medications that are regularly consumed. If your child is on medication, make sure they are not giving it or selling it to their friends.
 - The more that is learned about the brain through advancements in technology, the more that the evidence points to the probability that early drug or alcohol use raises the chance of addiction in adult years. Keep that conversation about this going with your children. Therefore do everything in your power to delay the onset of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use.
 - Although it is exhausting and challenging keep asking your teen the following, “who, what, when, where?” Know where your children are and who they are with. Also, keep track of your children through their cell phone.
 - Now that you are no longer clueless, keep yourself updated about current trends and aggressively exercise your right as a caring parent to keep your children safe. The bottom line is that your vigilance and caring is saying “I love you.”
 - Remember, teens view silence as approval.
 - Take the time to continually explain why you don't want your teen to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. Stress the social, emotional, and physical consequences.
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Westchester County Passes Two Laws

Social Host Law

Under the Social Host Law, where an adult knowingly allows a party, gathering or event in their home where minors are present and drinking alcohol, and that adult fails to take corrective action to stop the illegal activity, he or she could be fined between \$250 and \$1,000. Repeated offenses could result in jail time.

The Social Host Law does not apply to certain situations, such as where a parent has given his or her minor child alcohol; where alcohol is used as part of an approved education program; and where alcohol is consumed by a minor for religious purposes.

Sale of products containing DXM Restricted For Those Under 18

The Westchester County Board of Legislators approved a law that will prohibit the sale of over-the-counter cough suppressants made with Dextromethorphan, or DXM, to minors under the age of 18. DXM, when taken in large doses, can cause intoxication. The legislation is also known as “Anthony’s Law,” after Anthony Viero, an 87-year old WWII veteran from Yonkers who was tragically killed in a car accident in Westchester in which the driver was intoxicated by DXM.

The legislature’s action is in response to growing national concern over the use of DXM by teenagers as a substitute for alcohol to “get high.” While DXM is safe at the recommended dosage, when ingested at a certain level, it can produce euphoric states similar to the “highs” associated with illegal drug use, including hallucinatory effects traditionally associated with LSD or PCP. In Westchester, over the past year alone, one fatality and one critical visit to the emergency room have been attributed to the cough syrup ingredient

Upcoming Events

October 19 **6:30-9:00pm**
Voices and Choices, Perspectives and Challenges of Underage Drinking
Doubletree Hotel, Tarrytown
Parent Panel; Andrew J. Spano, Janet DiFiore, and Grant Mitchell, MD
Road Recovery for Teens
Contact: JCC on the Hudson, 366-7898

October 28 **7pm**
Mike Nerney
The Harvey School, Katonah
Contact: 232-3161

October 29 **7pm**
Teens, Parents, Drugs and The Law
The Alliance For Safe Kids, . Mercy College, Yorktown campus.
Janet DiFiore, , Westchester County DA; Sal Lagonia, Westchester Bar Assn.; and Ellen Morehouse, Student Assistance Services
Contact: Stefanie Carbone, -245-7316

Nov 5 **6:15-9:30pm**
Family Symposium
Byram Hills High School
“The Pressured Child: Michael Thompson, PhD
Contact: edvp@bhptsa.org