
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, November, 2018



The holidays can be a wonderful time of year to celebrate with family and friends. Most of us anticipate the holiday gatherings. However, they do come with challenges and one of those is that young people have more access to alcohol because of increased availability at holiday celebrations.

There are also stresses that can make teens be tempted to use alcohol and other drugs. The stresses of this time of year may be the college application process, exams, social and relationship concerns, and issues related to family problems that are magnified during the holiday season. In addition, there are usually more social gatherings for teens and teens may bring alcohol and other drugs to these events.

With adults busy during the holidays, there is reduced supervision of teens as parents are focused on their usual responsibilities and the chores associated with the holidays. This reality provides teens increased opportunities for using alcohol or other drugs.

Therefore it is especially important to remember that family health and being present are the best presents.

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Risky Business *Holidays*

There are times during the year when students are more likely to be tempted to use alcohol and other drugs. These times usually are associated with a holiday or event like Homecoming or Halloween. The celebrations associated with prom and graduation are also a time when teens may experiment with alcohol and other drugs.

The holidays are another period that teens are at increased risk for the use of substances. The holiday season is considered to begin the night before Thanksgiving and goes to New Year's Day. **According to SAMSHA, on an average December day, more than 11,000 young people, aged 12 to 17, will use alcohol for the first time.**

Data about drunk driving shows that one of the most dangerous days of the year for teens and college students is Thanksgiving Eve. In 2012, the Wall Street Journal first reported on the phenomenon and the paper referred to it as **"Blackout Wednesday"**. The name refers to "blacking out", which is characterized by memory loss due to excessive drinking. This night is also referred to as "Drinksgiving," or "Wacky Wednesday."

In addition, during the holidays there are more intergenerational parties occurring where alcohol is available. As wonderful as these gatherings can be when grandparents, parents and children gather together, alcohol is often served and there may not be monitoring as to who is getting something to drink. In addition older siblings, who are over 21 can inappropriately provide younger people with a drink or two disguised as a non-alcoholic beverage.

It is important for adults to provide supervision at family and other holiday gatherings. Parents need to communicate clear expectations of behavior before teens attend a social gathering. Offering suggestions for starting a conversation, refusing a drink or the use of drugs, and addressing boredom can be very helpful for teens. Offers of fun experiences and alternative entertainment, and checking that there is proper supervision during the entire party can also reduce youth substance use.

It is also important for the adults to model healthy behavior at a holiday party. Actions speak louder than words and children are always looking at and evaluating the behaviors of older siblings and cousins as well as adults, especially their parents.



Another concern is that this time of year can be a very challenging and stressful time. Starting with the amount of things that need to be done in a very limited time, parents can get easily overwhelmed. Shopping for presents, planning meals, decorating the home, and working extra hours can add to the existing stresses of work and other responsibilities.

The holidays can be especially difficult when there are financial problems, there has been the loss of a loved one, or there is an ill or absent family member. The fact that the holidays are “supposed” to be happy, can accentuate feelings of loss, pain and alienation. In the age of social media where so many are posting pictures of parties and fun times, one can easily feel left out and think that their life is very lonely and isolated compared to their friends who seem to be having such good times. Teens, especially, do not understand that pictures, posts, tweets, and messages may not be the reality.

The holidays can be very emotional and can create stressful situations where there is the potential for someone to drink too much, relapse, misuse drugs, get overwhelmed, work too hard to have a nice celebration, spend too much money, or have unrealistic expectations about the holidays.



New research has shown that marijuana’s negative effects on attention, memory, and learning can last for days or weeks after the acute effects of the drug wear off. As a result, a student who smokes marijuana daily may be functioning at a reduced intellectual level most or all of the time. Considerable evidence suggests that students who smoke marijuana have poorer educational outcomes than their nonsmoking peers.

Marijuana, Teens, and Memory: Update

A recent study by Schuster et al, in the October 2018 online version of *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* found that “memory, but not attention, improved more among adolescents and young adults who abstained from cannabis compared to those who continued to use.” This finding is consistent with that of prior studies that indicated neurocognitive dysfunction persists after several days of abstinence, particularly with memory, and findings that verbal (word) memory improved after 4-8 weeks of abstinence.”

This study along with other studies contributes to the evidence that marijuana impacts the neurocognitive functioning of teens in a negative way.

“The adolescent brain is undergoing significant neurodevelopment well into the 20s, and that regions that are last to develop are those regions that are most populated by cannabis receptors and also very critical to cognitive functioning.” (Randi Schuster)

Researchers are concerned about THC, the active ingredient in marijuana because it affects the parts of the brain that matures during adolescence. “The adolescent brain is undergoing significant neurodevelopment well into the 20s, and those regions that are last to develop are those regions that are most populated by cannabis receptors and also very critical to cognitive functioning” say Randi Schuster, the director of neuropsychology at Massachusetts General Hospital’s Center for Addiction Medicine and the study’s lead author.

Memory is very important for adolescents in a school setting. Schuster says that “For an adolescent in their history class learning new facts for the first time, we’re suspecting that active cannabis users might have a difficult time putting that new information into their long-term memory.”

This study did not prove that abstaining from cannabis improves adolescents’ attention

but the researchers think that it might just take longer than four weeks of abstinence for the attention levels to improve. Most of the memory improvement for the non-users occurred during the first week of the study.

Schuster says that it is hopeful and good news that some of the deficits that are caused by cannabis appear to be reversible and some of them are quickly reversible. This sends an important message to students that discontinuing marijuana use can have a positive impact on their academic success.

Note: Marijuana and other products containing THC are increasingly being used in e-cigarette devices including JUULs, making it more difficult for parents to detect teen use.

Up Coming Events

Tuesday, December 11,

8:15am to 3:15pm

**Doral Arrowwood Hotel
Conference Center
Rye Brook, NY**

***When The Holidays Aren’t
So Happy: Cultural Issues
for Clinical Work with Adolescents***

⇒ *Cultural Issues for Clinical
Work with Adolescents*

⇒ *Youth in High Achieving
Schools*

⇒ *Clinical Strategies in Working
with Muslim Adolescents and
Their Families*

⇒ *Engaging Parent of Adolescents
for Prevention,
Treatment and Recovery*

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