
Parenting for Prevention

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Summer, 2018

Summer: Parenting Challenges



Last month this publication covered some of updates in recent research related to vaping, STDs

and resiliency in families with substance abuse disorders. The newsletter can be accessed at www.sascorp.org.

This month the newsletter is covering the use of alcohol by teens, driving and positive parenting strategies to address the challenges posed by the summer.

It is not uncommon for teens to use alcohol and marijuana for the first time during the summer and not fully understand the impact of these two drugs on their body. As a result, they can end up in the emergency room with an alcohol related injury, a psychiatric crises or even alcohol poisoning.

With increased spring and summer news coverage of legalizing recreational marijuana use in NY State and decreases in the perception that marijuana is harmful, it is especially important for parents to clearly explain the dangers of youth marijuana use.

The staff at Student Assistance Services wishes everyone a safe, restful and renewing summer.

Patricia Murphy Warble, LMSW, CPP

As we know, the summer is a more relaxed time and teenagers often have a lot of unstructured time which can present challenges for parents as teens have more opportunities to gather in unsupervised settings where no responsible adults are present. During the summer, parents need to be particularly alert to what their children are doing, where they are going and who they are spending time with during their vacation.

Those students who are moving from the eighth to ninth grade and twelfth grade to college are vulnerable as transitions are identified as a time when teens are more likely to begin or increase their use of alcohol and other drugs. Research also shows that the summer is the time that many teens try alcohol and marijuana for the first time.

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Robert DuPont, MD, the former Director of the National Institute for Drug Abuse and the former “drug czar,” spoke last year at the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth meeting about the need to keep teens from using the three gateway drugs; alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine. Dr. Du Pont went onto say, “Drug prevention is not drug by drug, rather it is about any and all drug use by youth. Prevention needs to support the primary goal of no use of any alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drugs to maintain the health of our young people.”

There is concern among substance abuse prevention professionals about recent trends that make this summer a time when parents need to be aware of the activities of their children. Some of the trends that have Westchester professionals concerned are based on recent student surveys, articles in local papers, and anecdotal reports from substance abuse professionals.

The legalization of marijuana in some states, the approval of medical marijuana in New York, and the current platforms and legislation that elected officials and candidates are considering in New York State has been one of the trends that have contributed to the decreased perception of harm of marijuana use among teens. Research has shown that when

the perception of harm declines, the use rises.

Teens and the Opioid Epidemic

Prescription drug use is also a concern among our young people. In some cases a teen will begin to use a strong drug legitimately to deal with the pain associated with a dental or orthopedic procedure. However, for some teens, taking these medications results in them becoming addicted and once the pain subsides, they may have experienced while taking the drug.

Other teens may get access to these drugs from peers and begin to experiment with them just to see what it feels like to take them, to alleviate stress or to cope with all the other negative, unsettling and confusing feelings that are often a part of the adolescent experience. Unfortunately, the consequences can be devastating as some of the young people who become addicted to the narcotics and need increased amounts to prevent the discomfort of withdrawal.

In most cases, their supply runs out or access to a prescription drug ends and the teen cannot afford the street price for an opioid which can run as high as \$80 for a pill. These young people become the target of drug dealers who suggest heroin as an alternative which is plentiful and cheap.

E-Cigarettes

The use of e-cigarettes has exploded in our area. Many parents and students do not realize that there are great concerns about the use this method of using nicotine and/or marijuana. There are concerns about the act of inhaling a foreign substance into the lungs

and there are additional concerns that are related to the substance that the person is inhaling. Since the phenomena of vaping is relatively new, there is not yet any research-based information about the long term impact of vaping. However, in the short term there is evidence based on knowledge about addiction and introducing a foreign substance into the body that makes health professionals worried.

There is concern that when a young person vapes nicotine, they are using a powerful stimulant that is addictive and can impair the developing brain. Even if they don't have nicotine in them, they can have other chemicals, or produce other chemicals, that are known to be cancer causing – such as formaldehyde. Students may also be vaping marijuana and there are significant dangers to using this drug as well.

Finally, the drug of choice for most teens is alcohol and given the warmer weather, the informality of summer and a more relaxed schedule, the opportunities for teens to get alcohol and gather in venues to drink is easier. Anecdotally, there is often an increase in alcohol poisoning as inexperienced teens misjudge the intoxicating impact of alcohol and can even end up in the emergency department of their local hospital.

So what can parents do to offset the dangers associated with this time of year? Michael Nerney, prevention specialist, recommends the following parenting strategies that can be implemented to help keep children safe during the summer.

Aware

Every family should have a strategy in place so that they know where their teen is and who they are with during the day and at night. Be sure to check-in with other parents and make sure that all the teens are in a supervised setting with a responsible adult. Empty houses with no adult supervision have proven to be very dangerous places for teens in Westchester County. It is usually in this unchaperoned setting that many teens first try alcohol and drugs or have their first sexual encounter. Text messaging, talking on the cell phone and even asking your teen to take a picture of where they are and then have them send it to you, have made the job of knowing where your child is much easier.

Alert

Be alert to any behavioral changes in your child during the summer. **Teens are much more likely to try alcohol, cigarettes, and other drugs for the first time during the summer months.**

Awake

When your children get home, give them a hug or a kiss and talk to them for a few minutes to make sure they are not under the influence of any substance.

It may be a deterrent for your children to use alcohol or other drugs if they know that they will have to pass the “hug/kiss/talk” test later on in the evening. If anything in their behavior concerns you, make sure they are safely in bed and wait until the morning to address the issue. Important note: If your teen seems impaired, DO NOT LEAVE THEM ALONE “to sleep it off.” Keep

them awake and talking. Call 911 immediately if your teen cannot walk, keep their head up or stay awake.

Assertive

Make sure you and your child have discussed appropriate consequences for inappropriate and unhealthy behavior. The consequences should be timely, time appropriate, firm, respectful and related to the behavior. Furthermore, although this can be difficult, the consequences must be enforced.

Affirming

Let your children know that you love them and want them to have a wonderful summer. Help them understand that they are the most precious people in your life and if they feel that you are being too protective, it is because it is your job to keep them safe.

Volunteering/Internships

Another strategy that parents can use to offset a teen having too much unstructured time during the summer is to encourage their child to do some volunteer work, get an unpaid internship or see if they can “shadow” someone at a job in an industry or profession they are interested in joining. Usually a friend of a parent or relative is willing to help a young person learn about an industry or profession and will allow them to “shadow” them for some hours during a week.

There are many benefits to volunteer work. Volunteer work expands a teen’s understanding of other people’s lives and can give them a new view of the world and the problems within it. Volunteering also gives a teen an opportunity to meet new people from different backgrounds, learn new skills, gain an understanding of a work environment and sometimes having the experience of knowing that they have changed a life or place for the better.

Alcohol Facts

- ◆ Alcohol is still the drug most likely to be first used and abused by the largest number of teens. Young people who start drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics or abuse alcohol than are people who wait until the legal age, 21 for their first use of alcohol.
- ◆ SAMHSA reports that underage drinking accounts for 11 percent of all the alcohol consumed in the United States.
- ◆ Although the 2017 Monitoring the Future study reported that binge drinking has decreased among teens, it remains a concern. One in every five teen drivers involved in fatal car crashes has alcohol in their bloodstream, according to the CDC. More than 80 percent have blood-alcohol levels above the legal limit for adults. Binge drinking can also result in unplanned sex, blackouts, (forgetting what happened when he or she was drunk), and alcohol poisoning which can stop them from breathing.
- ◆ The brain keeps developing into a person’s 20s and even early 30s, she explains Vivian Faden, a scientist at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Addiction says, “For humans, this means binge drinking during adolescence may permanently change brain functioning,” What’s more, she adds, these changes “appear to be irreversible.”
- ◆ Teen drinking impacts the area of the brain that controls executive function. Poor executive function makes it harder for individuals to control their behavior. This makes it more difficult for teens to stop doing something that they know could hurt them. A person with poor executive function may be less likely to avoid or refuse the chance to drink alcohol, may get behind the wheel of a car when it would be dangerous to drive, may be a passenger when the driver is impaired, and/or take other dangerous risks.
- ◆ As alcohol makes a teen less likely to turn down alcohol, the risk of binge drinking grows. This drinking can create a cycle of unhealthy or inappropriate behavior and may lead to an alcohol use disorder in some teens, Faden notes. The bottom line, she says: When it comes to the developing adolescent brain, **“There is no known safe level of binge drinking.”**

Safe Driving

The June, 2018 edition of AAA Northeast identified the “100 Deadliest Days” for teens to drive is the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day when the average number of deadly teen crashes climbs 15 percent compared to the rest of the year. The article stated, according to research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, new teen drivers ages 16-17 are three times more likely as adults to be involved in a deadly crash. Nearly two-thirds of people injured or killed in a crash involving a teen driver are people other than the teen behind the wheel (for example, drivers of another vehicle, passengers, pedestrians, etc). That’s why it is so important for parents and caregivers to talk to their children about safe driving habits as the summer approaches.

To keep roads safer this summer, talk with your teen driver about avoiding distractions and keeping a safe speed—and be sure to model those habits yourself. Explain that eating, drinking, chatting with a passenger, reading a map, personal grooming, reaching for things in the car or looking at people or objects can remove their attention from the road. Parents should become effective in-car coaches, set a positive example, make informed decisions about access to a vehicle and manage their teen’s overall driving privileges.

Last year New York crashes involving injuries and young drivers were most common in June, followed by July, according to the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research. Throughout 2017, 16-17-year-old motorists were involved in a crash one every hour on average.

The AAA Key@Drive website has resources to prepare parents and teens for the summer driving season, including parent-teen driving agreement that sets family rules for teen drivers.

