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# Parenting for Prevention

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Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, June, 2011

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## See You In September



This will be the last newsletter for this school year. During the summer we will turn our attention to plans for next year.

It is a very exciting time as our latest grant, Prevention First-NY! will be able to fund county-wide prevention efforts which will help every community in Westchester County. As a result of this new initiative, it is our hope that communities that have not come to the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth steering committee meetings in the past, will consider sending a representative to the monthly meetings so that there is representation from all of the communities in the county. Although the meetings are usually the first Thursday of the month, the first meeting of the 2011-2012 school year will be September 8, at 11am at Student Assistance Services.

Everyone at SAS joins me in wishing you a relaxed, safe and happy summer so that we can, return to our work refreshed and renewed in the fall.

**Patricia Murphy Warble, LMSW,  
CPP**

## Summer Time

Summer vacation is a time that most families look forward to all year. The pace slows down, there are no deadlines for papers and projects, students do not have to study for tests, families have more time to spend together and for many there are fewer responsibilities. There is also more time to explore new interests and more opportunities to engage in leisure time activities.

During the summer, many students search for a job, and also might look for ways to learn new skills and investigate new activities. This year may be difficult in terms of teens finding paying jobs, so one alternative is to look for opportunities to volunteer at a local agency or hospital. Teens may also take accelerated courses or investigate a new interest at one of the local colleges.

During the summer, parents can help their child refine and develop their emotional, social and coping skills so that they are better able to deal with social and academic pressures during the school year.

In addition to working, volunteering or taking some classes, the summer also offers teens the opportunity to spend more time with family members. During the summer, parents can help their child refine and develop their emotional, social and coping skills so that they are better able to deal with social, emotional and academic pressures during the school year.

There is good reason to help your teen develop social skills by doing role-playing or taking the time to discuss ways to handle challenging situations. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) in its guide entitled *Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents* says that these life skills are valuable to help children be successful, but also in order for programs that prevent alcohol and drug abuse to be effective helping young people develop positive social skills, resistance skills, and acquire the ability to communicate effectively, decreasing the risk of substance abuse.

Prevention research also demonstrates the value of strong connections between children and significant others, including parents, peers, teach-

ers, or other important adults as a way of preventing drug abuse. Those strong relationships are more difficult to make if a child lacks social skills and the ability to make connections.

A good way to help your child develop better social, emotional and coping skills is to respond to what can be described as a “teachable” moment. Using communication skills that do not make your child defensive, parents can explore different ways to handle a situation. For example, when your child has an argument with a friend, sibling or even a parent, a parent can intervene with an I message such as “When you yell at your sister, I feel concerned because I think you are being disrespectful. Let us brainstorm a better way to resolve this conflict.”

Role playing is another very effective tool. A parent can present their child with a typical but possibly challenging scenario, then “role-play” with your child different ways to handle the situation, and then evaluate the benefit and risk of various options. This is a very effective way to help your child develop refusal skills.

Another way to help young people develop good social skills is to explore alternatives to unhealthy behaviors. This way, they can try different ways to handle situations, and if the strategy is not successful, then another strategy can be explored.

Practicing these skills in an informal summer environment when

both students and parents have more time can be a very valuable exercise. Doing this throughout the summer will empower your child to be better equipped and feel more confident in dealing with challenging situations.

### **Summertime Concerns**

There are many positive things that a teen can do during the summer but summer can also be a challenging time. The absence of a structured schedule may result in lack of physical activity, too much television, and more opportunities to be in unsupervised settings. More casual warm-weather settings may encourage students to let down their guard which can result in them making poor decisions.

There are also several recent trends that make this summer of special concern to substance abuse prevention specialists.

#### **Bath Salts**

On May 23, 2011, New York State Commissioner of Health Nirav R. Shah, M.D. issued a Commissioner’s Order to ban the sale and distribution of dangerous amphetamine-type substances marketed as “bath salts” that are sold over-the-counter and have resulted in hundreds of hospitalizations nationwide.

In an effort to mask their true purpose, a number of products are marketed as “bath salts” and are being sold online, in small convenience stores and other retail outlets. They produce similar effects as cocaine and amphetamines, including hallucinations,

paranoia, delusions, suicidal thoughts, and violent behavior as well as chest pains, increased blood pressure, and increased heart rate.

The substances are sold under names like White Lightning, Snow Leopard, Tranquility, Zoom, Ivory Wave, Red Dove, Vanilla Sky, and others.

Commissioner Shah said, “These chemicals marketed as bath salts are a growing and dangerous threat to the public health, and this action to end the sale and distribution of these harmful substances is a critical step needed to stop the proliferation of these drugs here in New York State. These substances present a real and immediate threat to the health and safety of our young adults and the public at large.”

#### **Marijuana & Summer**

Research that was done by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) in 2002 is still relevant today. The research found that more teens try marijuana for the first time during the summer months than any other time of year.

Other trends and information about marijuana adds additional concerns about the use of this drug by young people. The 2010 data from the Monitoring the Future, and data from the 2010 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study show that the use of marijuana is increasing among high school students. The Partnership Study showed that the percentage of high school students who reported using marijuana in the past year increased from 32% in 2008 to 39% in 2010.

In addition, the issue of “medical marijuana” has resulted in a decrease in the perception of harm of marijuana by teens. This is a precursor for increased use. Thirty years of research demonstrates that when the perception of harm decreases, the use of the drug increases.

### Alcopops

The term “alcopops” describes a sweetened alcoholic beverage that is usually sold in single serving bottles or cans. They are often bubbly and/or fruit-flavored, and resemble soda or other soft drinks.

These products contain up to 12% alcohol and come in 16-24 oz cans and 12 oz bottles. They are often referred to as “binge in a can” and one serving can be the equivalent to drinking five beers. However, up to half of the alcohol in alcopops is derived from distilled spirits.



Alcopops are described as being designed for “entry-level drinkers,” girls, and those that do not like the taste of beer. The packaging is designed to resemble non-alcoholic beverages like ice tea or lemonade but in reality they are potent alcoholic beverages. Many parents are unaware that these drinks have alcohol in them and think that their child is drinking an energy drink or a non-alcoholic beverage.

Even though most of these drinks have distilled spirits in them, the alcohol industry claimed they were made from beer so that they could be taxed at a lower rate, sold in convenience stores, and advertised on television. According to The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth there is a correlation between alcohol advertising and marketing and the onset of drinking among youth. So, advertising these drinks to young people is a significant factor in terms of their popularity among young drinkers.

In addition, allowing alcopops to be sold in convenience and grocery stores makes them more accessible to young adults. It is less likely that a teen will be asked for identification in a convenience store. If alcopops were only available in a liquor store, it is likely that young people would not be able to purchase them as these establishments are more vigilant about checking identification.

There is currently legislation being considered in many states including New York regarding these beverages. The legislation includes a bill to reclassify alcopops as distilled spirits, to ban the sale of flavored malt beverages over 12 oz. and to tax these beverages at a higher rate that is consistent with the taxes levied on other distilled spirits.

### Opana

Recently there have been reports by substance abuse professionals and treatment centers that they are seeing more Opana in the county.

The drug is similar to morphine and is prescribed to continuously treat moderate to severe pain throughout the course of twenty-four hours. Opana is primarily prescribed in the form of an extended-release oral tablet. However, it can also be prescribed as a suppository or be injected intravenously with the assistance of a healthcare professional.

Due to the high dosage contained in every tablet, crushing, chewing or snorting can be very dangerous. Combining the pill with alcohol can be fatal. Opana overdoses can cause extreme drowsiness, cold/clammy skin, difficulty breathing, and cardiac arrest.

### Times of Transition

During times of transition, both adults and young people are more vulnerable. The transition from eighth grade to high school and from 12th grade to college can often be a risky time for a young person.

Eighth graders are particularly vulnerable as many have not had much experience with engaging in more “adult” behaviors and are often not really aware of the consequences of their behaviors. They feel like they are adults now that they are going to high school and that their parents should allow them to have more responsibility and freedom.

Parents feel caught in the middle as they struggle to give their children more autonomy in a responsible way. Most of the time the transition is made without significant consequences. But other times there can be devastating results.

Several hospitals in the county report that they usually get several young adolescents admitted to the emergency room with acute alcohol poisoning during the summer. The students do not realize the effects of drinking too much and they get so intoxicated that they need urgent medical care.

Anecdotally, the medical personnel in many Westchester County emergency rooms, report that when a child comes into an emergency room with alcohol poisoning, it is often their first experience with drinking alcohol. In trying to “prove” themselves or keep up with older teens, they end up drinking too much, too quickly and become intoxicated.

### Lazy Cakes

Melatonin, a hormone naturally secreted by the brain to regulate the body’s circadian rhythm, or internal “clock,” has been recently used (and abused) as an ingredient in brownies. Lazy cakes are sold online and in local convenience stores for about \$4 and are packaged in a child-friendly way. They can be very dangerous for teens and can interact with prescription drugs.

## Tips for Parents

### *Be Proactive*

The Anti-Drug Parenting Tips newsletter makes some of the following recommendations on their website, [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com), to help parents keep their young people safe during the summer.

- Establish a summer curfew for your teen. It is often helpful to do this with your teen so that you are on the same page and your teen is more likely to abide by the curfew if you have set it together.
- Help plan activities to keep your teen busy.
- Schedule time together to do something fun as a family.
- Check in with adult supervisors such as coaches or employers to make sure your child is where they are supposed to be and doing what they are supposed to be doing.
- Meet your child’s friends, especially those that your teen hangs out with regularly.

- If possible, form a friendship circle with the parents of your children’s friends and try to set curfews and strategies together to keep teens in safe and supervised settings together.
- Set some sort of check in system, the popularity of texting makes this very easy. Your children can send you a message while maintaining their privacy.
- If there is any doubt as to the true whereabouts of your child, ask them to take a picture and email it to you!
- If you are worried about your teen’s substance use, call SAS intervention service at 914-332-1300 to speak to an intervention specialist or for other help with substance abuse or problem gambling call 1-877-846-7369.

