
Parenting for Prevention

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



Last month's edition of this newsletter discussed some of the concerns of the holiday season as they impact students in our local schools. However, there is also concerns about a child returning from college, who might unduly influence a younger sibling to use alcohol and other drugs.

It is usually a good idea if there are younger children at home to have a talk with any returning college students and set forth your expectations about introducing any of the younger children to alcohol or other drugs. Setting limits gets everyone on the same page and there is no room for any misunderstandings.

Despite concerns and issues, it is also time to take a pause from worries and celebrate this joyous time of year. Ellen Morehouse and the staff at SAS joins me in wishing everyone a happy and health holiday season and new year.

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The Unintended Impact of Attending High Achieving Schools

One of the primary reasons that parents choose to live in a community is the reputation of the school district. Most parents try to find a community with the best school district that they can afford and often work and/or commute very long hours to produce the income to live in the school district. This confluence of parent absence and a high achieving academic setting can result in various psychosocial risks for the children.

High Achieving Schools (HAS) are those with high standardized test scores, rich extracurricular and academic offerings, and graduates heading to some of the most selective colleges. These schools emphasize the importance of community and relationships in fostering growth of the "whole child", helping students grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally, while strengthening character and civic engagement. There are many school districts in Westchester County that meet the criteria that would designate them as a HAS.

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Unfortunately, studies conducted by Suniya Luthar, Ph,D and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation report on Adolescent Wellness, July, 2018 have shown that upper-middles class children who attend a HAS can show elevated disturbance in several areas; substance use, anxiety and depression. The research goes on to show that there are two sets of factors that seem to be implicated; excessive pressures to achieve, and physical and emotional isolation from their parents.

The researchers found that students with achievement pressures view their achievement failures as personal failures and had relatively high depression, anxiety and substance abuse. There was also a sense that their parents valued their accomplishments more than their personal character.

In addition, among upper-middle class families and families that work long hours, older students are often left alone for several hours each week. As a result, a child's need for emotional closeness may suffer as parents' careers and other interests may reduce their availability for "family time." Many students in HAS are involved in after-school activities which also erodes time spent with their parents. Again, the results showed that both physical and emotional isolation were linked to substance use.

According to the research done by Dr. Luthar, substance abuse by students who attend HAS schools is generally higher than the national average. She goes on to say that this is because: there is often a lack of consequences from parents for students using alcohol and other drugs; social gatherings are centered around the availability and use of alcohol and other drugs with a peer norm that accepts "getting wasted;" the easy access to money, fake IDs, cars and venues for parties; and finally the acceptance of students using alcohol and other drugs to deal with their pressures to succeed academically, socially, and in their extracurricular activities.

This pressure to succeed comes from several sources. The family usually has expectations that their child should do well in school so that they can have the advantages that their parents have had in their life. Peers put a lot of pressure on each other and are often comparing themselves to their friends and successful students in their school. Girls have the additional pressure of measuring up in terms of their physical appearance and for boys substance use can go along with popularity.

Social media plays a very important role in the issue of pressure as it exacerbates the impact and influence of how a student perceives their popularity and success. A student may be doing fine at school but postings on social media may make it look like a majority of the students are doing better, are smarter, are more popular and are having more fun.

School districts want to maintain or improve their reputation for excellence so they may put pressure on their students to do well in standardized testing. Finally, students also put pressure on themselves and at times have an unrealistic expectation about their ability to be an outstanding student. All these factors contribute to a higher level of depression and anxiety among young people.

The suicide rate for Caucasian children and teens between 10 and 17 was up 70% between 2006 and 2016, according to the latest data available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although African American children and teens have lower rates of suicide, the rate of increase was higher, 77%.

There are many factors that contribute to the increase in these statistics but the increases in anxiety and depression in young people are two important risk factors.

Recommendations for parents

Dr. Luthar makes the following evidence based recommendations to address these concerns:

- Parents are the "first-responders" to highly stressed youth and need to give their children support and unconditional acceptance.

- Promote good open honest communication which is the foundation for maintaining a connection to you children.

The best present you can give your child is your presence.

- Be very aware of your children's demeanor to make sure your children are not distancing themselves from you.

- If you see distress, depression, isolation, or anxiety in your children, consult a professional.

- Set appropriate and consistent limits and enforce them. Do not accept rudeness, bullying, substance use, rule-breaking or cheating.

- Be a good role model and be kind, respectful and empathetic. Helping your child become more thoughtful about their treatment of others, starts with the way you treat your child.

Marijuana Use “Driving” Increases In Drugged Drivers

December is National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month. Officials say December is one of the most dangerous months for alcohol impaired driving because of holiday parties. As a result, there are more patrols and check points to check for impaired drivers.

Driving under the influence of marijuana is increasing from coast-to-coast. Incidents of drugged driving are such a big concern across the country that the Governors Highway Safety Administration released a comprehensive guide for states to tackle the issue.

States that have legalized “recreational marijuana” have more drivers under the influence of marijuana. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, there has been up to a six percent increase in the number of highway crashes in four of the states that have allowed the sale of recreational marijuana.

Marijuana impaired driving is expensive to test. Because chemical testing is expensive, a growing number of police have been trained to do roadside testing of physical and behavioral indicators. In Colorado in 2016, the state itself reported of the 27,000 people pulled over for impaired driving, only 4,000 were tested for marijuana because police say it was too costly to test them all.

Driving ‘high’ affects all age groups. A SAMHSA study found that driving under the influence of illicit drugs peaks between the ages of 20 to 23. However, the National Institute of Health reports that an increasing number of older Americans are driving under the influence of alcohol and marijuana.

While most students and parents are aware of the dangers of driving under the influence of school, many do not realize that marijuana stays in the system longer and negatively impairs perception, judgment, and coordination, these critical skills for safe driving.

Driving impaired with a child in the car is reportable to the Child Abuse and Neglect Registry. Leandra's Law is a New York State law making it an automatic felony on the first offense to drive drunk with a person age 15 or younger inside the vehicle, and setting the blood alcohol content, or BAC, at 0.08. The bill was unanimously passed by the New York State Assembly and the New York State Senate and then signed into law by Gov. David Paterson on November 18, 2009.





They're already new drivers.

Add marijuana to the equation and teens are twice as likely to be involved in a crash.

Everyone knows that drinking and driving don't mix. But word on the street is, not everyone knows that using marijuana and driving are a combination for destruction. In fact, **marijuana is the most common illegal drug found in drivers who die in crashes.**

Why? Because marijuana makes it hard to judge distances and to react to signals and sounds on the road. Marijuana impacts driver alertness, concentration, coordination and reaction time.

Parents, just as you do with alcohol, set clear non drug-use expectations with your young driver.

Westchester parents, get facts, resources and tips from PowerToTheParent.org



Up Coming Events

January 31 7:00pm
Blind Brook High School

RyeACT, Blind Brook Community Coalition and Greenwich Hospital are sponsoring **Kevin Sabat, Ph.D, founder of SAM, Smart Approaches to Marijuana.**

Kevin has studied, researched, written about, and implemented drug policy for almost 20 years. He wrote the book, *Seven Great Myths About Marijuana*, and will discuss the status and implications of the legalization of marijuana.

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