
Parenting for Prevention

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Gift of Time



The best gift you can give your child this holiday season is the “gift of time”. Parents remain the most important influence on children, particularly when it comes to decisions about drugs and alcohol. Take a walk, go to a movie, ice skate, go shopping, have family dinners... share your time with your kids – it’s worth the investment!

As winter approaches, I am reminded about parents telling me how wonderful it is when there is a snow day and everyone is forced to stay home. For some, it is even better if power is lost and everyone must be resourceful in planning things to do together. Often, it is as simple as playing a game like Monopoly or playing card games.

A good exercise during the holidays might be to declare a “snow day” and all stay home and enjoy the gift of spending time together.

Everyone at SAS joins me in wishing you a happy holiday and new year.

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Stress During the Holidays

Many people consider this to be the most magical, wonderful time of the year, but for many it is also a stressful, emotional time. Things seem to get magnified during the holiday season and it takes a certain amount of energy to deal with some of the challenges associated with the holidays. Feelings about the holidays can range from anticipation and joy to anxiety, dread, and worry. College application deadlines, bad weather, and difficult financial situations can add to the stress.

The first step to surviving the holidays is to lower expectations about this emotionally charged time of year. There is a saying in the twelve step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous “that the greatest threat to serenity is expectations.” Expectations, which at times can often be unrealistic and impractical, can set us up for disappointment and frustration. Some other twelve step slogans may be a better way to proceed through the holiday time, accepting that “what is, is” and then proceed to “one day at a time.”

The celebration of the holidays may be different for families depending on their beliefs and values. However, the holidays usually include participating in some religious ritual but whether religious based or not, the holiday period also includes being thankful and appreciating the gift of family and friends. Keeping the focus on gratitude and appreciation rather than on the presents can go a long way to maintaining a good balance about what is important during this season. The simple things in life are usually the most profound. Spending time with family and friends, volunteering, and sharing a meal provides memories that last a lifetime, much longer than a present may be remembered. A study published in the January, 2010 issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology makes the point that experiences lead to more happiness than items.

The following are some recommendations from the Mayo Clinic website about how to cope with the holidays.

Acknowledge your feelings. It is normal to miss people and feel sad about people who are not with you for the holidays. It is okay to express your feelings and you do not have to force yourself to be happy just because it is the holiday season.

Reach out. If you are feeling sad or lonely reach out to others who can offer you support or companionship.

Be realistic. It is important to be flexible and understand that the holidays do not have to be perfect or the way they were in the past. Families change and so do the celebration of the holidays.

Set aside differences. The holidays are not a time to address issues that may have been disruptive during the year. A better strategy is to accept people as they are, even if they do not meet your expectations. Also, understand that everyone is feeling emotional during the holiday season and it is best to give every one a bit of slack in terms of behaviors.

Stick to a budget. One of the greatest stressors during the holidays is spending more than you can afford. It is easy to get carried away, so make a budget and stick to it.

Plan ahead. Set aside time to do the shopping, baking, socializing with other families and other activities. Simplify whenever possible!!

Learn to say no. Sometimes, rather than taking the chance that you will become overwhelmed and stressed out, just say no to taking on additional responsibilities, participating in a project or to an invitation.

Maintain healthy habits.

If you drink, be moderate in your use of alcohol and be aware of how much alcohol you are drinking. Do some exercising during the holidays. Just a thirty minute walk everyday can be beneficial. Finally, make sure that you get plenty of sleep. If you are overtired it will be hard to deal with the challenges that often occur during this period

Take a breather. Setting aside time for yourself and other family members can be refreshing for all of you. Playing games, listening to music, or spending time alone can go along way to soothing you so that you are better able to handle everything you need to do.

Seek professional help if you need it. If you are feeling persistently sad or anxious, have physical complaints, are unable to sleep, are irritable and hopeless, and are unable to face routine chores, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. A short term intervention can be very helpful to getting you back on track.

Choose Holiday gifts and stocking stuffers that do not promote youth gambling

Early exposure to gambling is a major reason teens are at risk of developing gambling problems.

**What You Permit, You Promote
Be Part of the Solution**

Online Gambling and Teenagers Today - Important Facts to Know

“Online Gambling” is a form of gambling that includes the use of the internet to place something of value at risk in hopes of achieving something of greater value. Adolescents use the internet more than any other age group. Research indicates that in spite of the fact that most internet gambling is illegal, 300,000 young adults (ages 14-21) are gambling online weekly and an estimated 700,000 young adults are gambling monthly.

Internet gambling provides teenagers the ability to access online gambling from the “safety” of their own home. Some of the most popular gambling sites include those that offer poker and other card games where tournaments can be played or where teens can make live bets against other members for money. Young people often start on .Net sites that allow them to “practice” and do not charge money. These sites have fairly good odds of winning so young players feel like they are mastering the game. At some point, the .Net site will have “pop-ups” that encourage the players to click into a .Com site. The pop-up tell the players that they could be earning money by playing. If a player does click on the .Com site they will be charged money to play and the odds of winning may be worse, meaning that players begin to lose more often, and therefore

are losing money. Other popular forms of gambling include fantasy sports betting. Fantasy sports include games where participants act as owners to build a team that competes against other fantasy owners; based on statistics generated by the real individual professional players. In fantasy sports there is the ability to trade, cut and sign players like a real sports owner. There are leagues that are free to play in and others where participants pay to participate. To be eligible to win prizes, individuals must create/join a pay league with an entry fee.

Gambling and the Adolescent Brain- Why Teens are Drawn to Online Gambling?

While many young people participate in online gambling and fantasy sports leagues without developing a problem, it is important to understand how young people's brains are wired to draw them into these gambling activities. Research shows that the adolescent brain is not yet fully developed. Judgment that involves resisting impulses and delaying gratification is still "under construction" (NYS OASAS, 2006). Online gambling sites are potentially more addicting than other forms of gambling for teens because the more rapid the play, the faster and riskier the gratification becomes. For instance, playing poker on the internet is more "risky" than playing poker "live" with a group. Adolescents are often hyper-focused and locked in. Reward sites in the brain such as the dopamine system, are more robust during adolescence than adulthood. This means that adolescents experience a more heightened reward experience than adults in the face of novel stimuli, such as online gambling.

Risk Factors

Just as with other health issues, like heart disease, there are certain factors that put a young person at greater risk for developing a problem with gambling. Teenagers growing up in a home where parents and/or significant others hold favorable attitudes toward gambling, or teenagers who have a family history of problem gambling or substance abuse increases the risk for developing problems related to gambling. Other factors that put teens at risk include community availability of gambling opportunities and community attitudes that are favorable toward gambling. Gambling at an early age also increases a teenager's risk of developing a problem (NYS OASAS, 2006)

Teen Gambling is related to Mental Health Problems and/or Alcohol/Drug Use

Research indicates that youth who gamble have higher rates of depression, anxiety, crime and delinquency. Many of these teens have a low self-esteem, poor coping skills and are more likely to participate in alcohol and other drug use (National Academy of Sciences).

According to the National Academy of Sciences, the earlier people begin gambling, the more likely they are to experience problems from gambling. Research indicates that teens who gamble are more likely to take part in other risky behaviors.

Warning Signs

Warning signs often include teens using gambling as a way to escape frustrations, stress and other problems. If your teen is suddenly displaying unexplained large amounts of money, new possessions, bragging about gambling wins; or has intense interest about gambling conversations. Other indicators that your teen may have a problem include stealing money or credit cards from parents and/or friends, spending more and more time on gambling-related activities on the internet such as checking scores

Steps Parents Can Take To Protect Their Teens from Online Gambling

Although online sites are not supposed to permit access to underage teens, there is no full proof way to make sure these sites are restricted. As parents, it is important to be aware of your own personal attitudes towards gambling and how much they influence your children. Recognize that gambling is not a risk-free behavior, and make sure to listen to your teens and understand their thoughts and attitudes about gambling. If you have a concern, look for warning signs and always promote a message of balance and healthy behaviors.

If you have questions or concerns, you can reach a gambling prevention professional at Student Assistance Services at (914) 332-1300.



Keeping Teens Safe During the Holidays

During the holiday season adults and teens can be attending the same functions and alcohol is often available at most of these parties. When teens see adults consuming a significant amount of alcohol as part of holiday celebrations or driving under the influence they may think that it is okay for them to drink and/or drink and drive.

An issue at some of these gatherings is that alcohol may be put out on a table where there is no supervision in regard to people helping themselves to drinks or no one is monitoring a young person who might be serving drinks. In a setting like this, it is difficult for parents to keep track of their children.

To offset the impact of this reality, parents can be pro-active in terms of keeping their teens safe and healthy during the holiday period. First and foremost, be a good role model for your teens. Modeling good behavior is worth a thousand words. It is hard to get across a message of appropriateness and moderation if your own choices around alcohol are unhealthy.

If you are not able to model healthy behavior, be honest with your teen, tell them what was unhealthy about your behavior, tell them that you hope to make healthier choices, and lastly, that you hope they will make healthier choices.

Talk to your teens about the risk of alcohol abuse during the holidays. Discuss the realities that even though there are more parties and celebrations, it is still important for adults to make healthy choices. Also talk about the fact that the holidays can be a difficult time for some people and that they may look to alcohol help them socialize or as a way to deal with unhappiness and depression. Brainstorm with them better and healthier ways to deal with these issues and point out that alcohol is a depressant and that it can actually aggravate these conditions.

Remember, what you permit, you promote. Set clear a clear and consistent “no use” messages about drugs and alcohol. In particular, let your children know that just because it is the holiday time and many of the adults around them are drinking, it is your expectation that they do not drink.

In addition to these suggestions, there are additional things that parents can do to keep your adolescents healthy during the holiday period.

- Begin by making sure that your teens are in a safe and chaperoned environment. When teens are “home alone” they are more likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol and engage in other risky behaviors.
- Consider signing a “Contract for Life” with your teen. This contract is between a parent and teen and states that parents agree to pick up a teen who needs a safe ride home or provide cab fare with no questions asked. The goal is to keep children safe for the moment and other concerns can be dealt with at a later date. The contract is available on the Internet at www.madd.org
- Clean out medicine cabinets so prescription & non-prescription drugs are not available to guests using your bathrooms.

Regional Bullying Prevention Conference is coming in February, details to follow.