
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, February, 2010

Brrrrrr



If you have stepped outside in the last few weeks, you know that it has been really cold.

There is even ice on the Hudson River this year, a beautiful sight to see and worth a trip to the river. I personally love it when it is cold. Come on, that is what winter is supposed to be, cold!

If it is cold then we have the possibility of snow and those wonderful snow days. I am one of those people who checks the 10-day Weather Channel website in the hopes that I will see the possibility of some snow in the future. Then I go on the “weather-watch” and hope that the prediction will not be disappointing. Unfortunately, it usually is and the amount of snow I want rarely arrives.

I think that it is wonderful, after the hectic holidays, to slow down during this time of year. Maybe read some of those books you were given during the holidays, cook some interesting new meals, or see the movies that have received Oscar nominations and plan on how to acknowledge those you love on Valentine’s Day.

Editor, Patricia Murphy Warble, LMSW, CPP

Monitoring the Future

New concerns about marijuana

The annual Monitoring The Future (MTF) study which has been tracking drug use among U.S. teens since 1975, showed that the use of marijuana is, according to the researchers, “tilting” upwards. This annual study is sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and designed and conducted by the University of Michigan.

“Not only is use rising, but a key belief about the degree of risk associated with marijuana use has been in decline among young people even longer, and the degree to which teens disapprove of use of the drug has recently begun to decline. Changes in these beliefs and attitudes are often very influential in driving changes in use.”

Marijuana use among American adolescents has been increasing gradually over the past two years (three years among 12th graders) following years of declining use, according to the latest MTF study. “So far, we have not seen any dramatic rise in marijuana use, but the upward trending of the past two or three years stands in stark contrast to the steady decline that preceded it for nearly a decade,” said University of Michigan researcher Lloyd Johnston, the study’s principal investigator. “Not only is use rising, but a key belief about the degree of risk associated with marijuana use has been in decline among young people even longer, and the degree to which teens disapprove of use of the drug has recently begun to decline. Changes in these beliefs and attitudes are often very influential in driving changes in use.”

The report also noted that the proportion of young people using any illicit drug is also up slightly over the past two years. This measure is driven largely by marijuana use, because marijuana is the most widely used of all illicit drugs. In 2009, marijuana use in the prior 12 months (annual prevalence) was reported to be about 12 percent of the nation’s 8th graders, 27 percent of 10th graders, and 33 percent of 12th graders. The proportions saying they used any illicit drug, including marijuana, in the past year for the same groups were 15 percent, 29 percent, and 37 percent.

MYTH: Marijuana is harmless.

FACT: Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug among youth today and is more potent than it was twenty years ago. The major active ingredient in marijuana is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) which causes the mind-altering effects of marijuana intoxication. The amount of THC determines the potency of marijuana. The more THC, the more potent the effect. Since 1980, the amount of THC in marijuana that is available in this country has increased.

During the seventies, most users began using marijuana between 17 and 19 years old. Many were in college or in the service. Today, a 11-13 year old child can be using marijuana for the first time. There is a significant difference between the physical and emotional maturity of an early or pre-adolescent and an older teen. An adolescent's body is not fully developed and as a result young people are at greater risk for addiction to any substance. Also, significant emotional and intellectual development takes place during the teen years and if a child is smoking marijuana or using other drugs, there is interference with developmental tasks.

The use of marijuana can lead to a host of significant health, social, learning, and behavioral problems at a crucial time in a young person's development. Getting high also impairs judgment, which can lead to risky decision making on issues like sex, criminal activity, or riding in an car with someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, teens who use drugs are five times more likely to have sex than teens who do not use drugs. Getting high also contributes to general apathy, irresponsible behavior, risky choices, and has recently been correlated with mental health problems. According to Steven Kipnis, MD, Medical Director of NY State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services, "Three marijuana cigarettes or blunts are as harmful as a pack of cigarettes."

MYTH: You can't get addicted to marijuana.

FACT: Last summer at the Student Assistance Services summer training, Zive Cooper, Ph.D. an Assistant Professor of Clinical Neuroscience at Columbia University presented some of the latest research on marijuana use. She reported that the hallmarks of addiction are present in the use of marijuana:

- Tolerance-An increased amount of marijuana is needed to achieve the desired effect
- Withdrawal- It is reported that marijuana is smoked to relieve withdrawal symptoms of sleeplessness, loss of appetite, irritability and physical craving
- Increased Usage-It is reported that more marijuana is smoked over a longer period of time than was intended
- Difficulty Decreasing Use -Efforts to cut down or control use are not successful.

- Preoccupation with the Drug- More time is spent in activities at to obtain, use or recover from the effects of marijuana use

In addition, marijuana use continues despite:

- A failure to fulfill major obligations at work, school or home
- That using marijuana puts a person in a situation that is physically hazardous.
- There are recurrent substance-related legal problems
- There is persistent and recurrent interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of using marijuana

Finally, more young people are entering treatment facilities with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illicit drugs combined.

MYTH: There's not much parents can do to stop their kids from "experimenting" with marijuana.

FACT: Parents are the most powerful influence on their children when it comes to drugs and other risky behaviors. According to research done by CASA, parents are the most important person in a teen's life. Teens need to hear from their parents about how risky and damaging marijuana use can be. By staying involved, knowing what their children are doing, discussing the dangers of use and setting limits with clear rules and consequences, parents can reduce the likelihood of their children's involvement with drugs.

MYTH: Young children are not exposed to marijuana.

FACT: This is one of the most

worrisome developments about the use of marijuana. Not only are younger children exposed to marijuana, according to the MTF study, but the number of adolescents using marijuana has increased significantly since 1991. This trend is coupled with the newest research about addiction and the brain which shows that the young brain is very susceptible to becoming addicted to a substance. Dr Cooper's research at Columbia University shows the kinds of problems that are associated with the use of marijuana by younger adolescents.

- Later problematic marijuana use
- Other drug use
- Decreased mental health
- Criminal offenses
- High risk sexual behavior
- Lower academic achievement

MYTH: There is no connection between using marijuana and mental illness.

FACT: Dr. Cooper discussed some findings which were mentioned in this newsletter in 2007. . . A study that is available at www.thelancet.com indicates that marijuana intoxication can produce psychotic experiences for users and that the chronic symptoms can persist beyond or occur independently of the actual time of intoxication.

A study published in the *Neurobiology of Disease Science Daily* in December, 2009, by Dr. Gabrielle Gobbi, a psychiatric researcher from the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Center, says that the damaging effects of marijuana on young brains is worse than origi-

nally thought. This study suggests that daily consumption of marijuana in teens can cause depression and anxiety and have an irreversible long-term effect on the brain.

Researchers say that it is not yet known whether the use of marijuana increases the incidence of established disorders such as schizophrenia or depression, or if the use of marijuana causes these disorders. However, the researchers conclude that there is sufficient evidence to warn young people about the possibility that using marijuana could increase their risk of developing a psychotic illness later in life.

Dr. Cooper concluded her presentation on marijuana by making the following key observations:

- Marijuana is not totally benign or treacherous
- There are consequences to heavy marijuana use that include dependence and cognitive disruptions and adolescents are more vulnerable to both
- Marijuana potency has increased over the years
- Large numbers of daily marijuana smokers will develop dependence
- Once dependent, it is difficult to achieve long-term abstinence



Further Results from Monitoring The Future

Prescription Drugs

There has been great concern about the misuse of prescription drugs over the past few years as the Monitoring The Future study documented their rising rates of use. These results are still of concern but with the exception of Aderall and OxyContin, the use of other prescription drugs are decreasing.

Over-The-Counter Cough and Cold Medicines

The use of cough and cold medicines like Robitussin by teens showed no decline in this year's study. In fact, annual prevalence rates have not changed much since 2006 when over-the-counter cough and cold medications were first measured.

Alcohol Use

Over the long term there has been a gradual decline in alcohol use at all three grade levels. The 30-day (or past month) prevalence has fallen from recent peak levels by over 40 percent among 8th graders, by over 25 percent among 10th graders, and by about one sixth among 12th graders. This year only the 8th graders showed a continuation of the decline, while use in the upper grades has stayed the same.

The MFT goes on to say that “Binge drinking, here defined as having five or more drinks in a row at least once in the prior two weeks, has shown similar proportional declines; again, only the 8th graders showed any indication of the decline continuing this year. (The rates in 2009 for having had any alcohol to drink in the past 30 days are 15 percent, 30 percent, and 44 percent in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades respectively; while the two-week prevalence of binge drinking at least once in the prior two weeks are 8 percent, 18 percent, and 25 percent.)

Perceived risk for binge drinking continued to rise for 12th graders but did not in the lower grades. When asked how easy it would be to get alcohol if they wanted some, the majority of students in all three grades said it would be ‘fairly easy’ or ‘very easy,’ but such easy availability has declined considerably in recent years in the lower grades, particularly in 8th grade. For example, in 1996 the proportion of 8th graders saying it would be easy to get alcohol stood at its peak level of 75 percent, but by 2009 this statistic

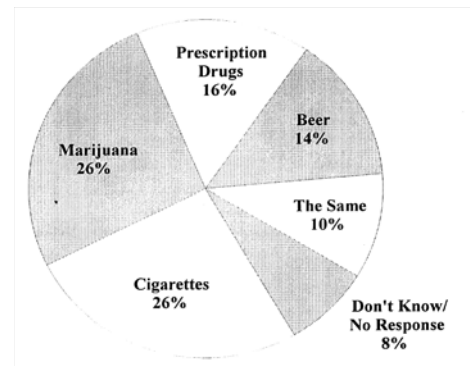
had fallen to 62 percent, including a significant decrease in 2009.”

The results of the use of alcohol by teens is heartening in terms of these national trends. According to Lloyd Johnston, the principal investigator of the MFT study, “It would appear that state and local efforts to crack down on sales to underage buyers, perhaps along with greater parental vigilance, have had an effect.”

Upcoming Events

March 2 **7:00-8:00pm**
Blind Brook High School
Pure Performance
Dennis O' Sullivan
Contact: 937-3600X3144

Percentage of Teens (Ages 12 to 17) Reporting Which Substance Is the Easiest for Someone Their Age to Buy*, 2009



*Teens were asked, “Which is easiest for someone your age to buy: cigarettes, beer, marijuana, or prescription drugs such as Oxycontin, Percocet, Vicodin or Ritalin, without a prescription?”