
Parenting for Prevention

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

Spring Is Here!



Spring is on its way and we all survived the winter of 2011, which actually began with the snow storm in December, 2010. Even I, who loves snow storms was waving the white flag by March.

So as we turn our thoughts to the warmer weather, there are issues of concern. Among those issues are the dangers associated with spring break.

This newsletter gives consideration to that topic and the way decisions made by a student on spring break can be influenced by the stress that we see our students experiencing and the increases in the use of marijuana and of prescription drugs. In addition, the positive data about alcohol use declining among teens that Monitoring the Future reports, does not apply to Westchester teens. The results from two Westchester County student surveys, one done in 2007 and one done in 2009, shows an increase in the use of alcohol by 10th and 12th graders.

Student Assistance Services received a new \$831,313 federal grant for the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth to fight underage drinking among Westchester County high school students.

Patricia Murphy Warble, LCSW, CCP

Rolling The Dice on the Future of Our Youth

What better time to highlight gambling than March Madness! The world of basketball is in full swing as sports enthusiasts throughout the country anxiously followed the journey to the “Sweet 16” and then to the exciting “Final Four.” Parents and teens compete to pick their teams during this time of great fun and camaraderie. Is this gambling you might ask? What actually defines gambling behavior?

Student athletes are at even greater risk of developing a gambling problem because of their competitive personalities and unreasonable expectations of winning.

When you stake or risk money or anything of value on the outcome of something involving chance, it is considered gambling. For example, if parents are informally vying for fun to see who wins the championship basketball game, that is not considered gambling. However, if they participate in a sports pool and there is an exchange of money, it is indeed gambling. March 6th – March 12th was National Problem Gambling Awareness Week. Throughout the week, communities nationwide focused their efforts on creating awareness and disseminating information on problem and compulsive gambling. Many of the high schools in our county participated in this year’s activities; in particular, sports gambling was highlighted because of its massive appeal to youth. Current research indicates that sports betting is now the most popular form of gambling among adolescents ages 14 – 22. Nearly a quarter of adolescent males bet on sports in an average month (The 2010 National Annenberg Survey of Youth). Youth gambling has been in the spotlight recently because Michael Jordan’s son tweeted that he lost \$35,000 in one night.

Most adults and, in particular, parents are surprised to hear that 3 out of 4 high school students gamble and up to 20% currently have or are at risk of developing a problem with gambling (NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services). Most of us do not think of gambling as having a similar potential for addiction as alcohol and other drugs. But it certainly does and, currently, approximately one million New Yorkers have a gambling problem. Student athletes are at even greater risk of developing a gambling problem because of their competitive personalities and unreasonable expectations of winning. According to the NCAA, 92% of male college athletes reported that they started gambling in high school or earlier and were first introduced to wagering on sports by completing an NCAA tournament bracket or buying a Super Bowl square. Boys are 4 times more likely than girls to develop a problem with gambling because they have a higher interest in gambling activities and an unrealistic belief in their skill. Many adolescent boys believe that, because they know all the teams and players, they have an increased chance of winning their bets.

Most adults can gamble in a recreational way and it does not become problematic. While betting on a tournament or football game does not automatically cause a problem or put someone on the path toward addiction, its popularity does create an imperative for education about responsible gambling behaviors.

A NY State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuses Services survey indicated that adolescent sports betting in Westchester County is higher than the state average.

Recently, a local high school Principal commented that most of the fights between boys at his school are the result of money owed due to gambling debts. A counselor at another school in the county recently reported that one of her students talked about betting \$1,000 on a playoff game the evening before. Many fathers who bet with their sons on the Super Bowl or this month's Final Four during "March Madness" may not even realize that the legal age to gamble in NY State is 18 and that most sports betting is illegal in our state.

Most problem gamblers report that they began gambling between the ages of 10 and 12; in addition, they also state their earliest gambling experiences were with family members.

The most recent research shows that, because the adolescent brain is not fully developed, young people experience a more heightened experience of pleasure than adults when they are exposed to the excitement of gambling. Their brain chemistry may be altered, leaving them at risk for developing future addictions. The earlier young people begin to gamble, the greater their chances of developing a problem

later on. Online gambling is particularly risky because the rapid play and quick gratification makes it more potentially addicting for adolescents. According to Dr. Nancy Snyderman, the Chief Medical Editor for the *The Today Show*, "when your brain is still developing, that reward path (the pleasure center of the brain) can become the pathway to addiction very fast."

What is the connection of gambling to other addictions? Youth gambling is associated with a variety of risk-taking behaviors, substance abuse, and even suicide. A NY State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuses Services survey indicated that adolescent sports betting in Westchester County is higher than the state average.

Substance use and abuse as well as a family history of addiction are highlighted as risk factors for developing a problem with gambling. Most problem gamblers report that they began gambling between the ages of 10 and 12; in addition, they also state their earliest gambling experiences were with family members. What grandparent ever gave a second thought to sharing scratch off tickets with their grandchildren? What we need is more expansive education and prevention efforts that reach out to all the residents in our county – youth, parents, educators, professionals, and seniors – to highlight the risks of problem gambling and what to do if you or a loved one needs help.

For more information, call 914-332-1300 or 1-877-8HOPE-NY.



Spring Break

Now that our challenging winter is coming to an end, most of us are looking forward to warmer weather and spring. Parents may be thinking about a welcome change in the season, planting gardens, playing a sport outside or even spring cleaning, but many teens are just thinking about one thing and that is spring break!

Spring break used to be primarily a college ritual, but now many high school students go on a trip during their spring vacation. In light of recent research and concerns, this is troubling to many parents, mental health experts and school-based professionals. There are many issues to be appropriately worried about if a teen is allowed to take a trip during this time. Spring break is often synonymous with alcohol abuse and other risky and/or illegal behaviors.

A statement from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention makes the following observations about spring break; "Spring break is infamous for wild parties, risky behavior, consumption of alcohol, and use of illegal substances. For many teens, it is a chance to get a taste of freedom from authority for a week. Unfortunately, this can be disastrous. The highest risks include promiscuity leading to unprotected sex, inebriation leading to assault, and illegal activities leading to arrest. Crimes such as vandalism, theft, assault, and rape commonly occur during spring break.

While not all teens take part in violent crimes and not all teens are victims, your teen could still be involved in unlawful activities over spring break. With the abundance of alcohol and substance abuse, it is no wonder that spring break opens so many opportunities for the commission of crime. In fact, according to the United States Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, more than 2,500 Americans are arrested each year while on spring break. Most of these arrests are drug related, usually dealing with marijuana. Alcohol also contributes to the crime occurrences.”

In addition, there are other issues than makes unsupervised trips during spring break of particular concern for Westchester teens. First of all, many Westchester parents and students have expressed concerns about the stress that teens are experiencing in their lives. To try and deal with these issues many communities have had community meetings to view the documentary, *Race to Nowhere*, which deals with issues associated with academic stress.

Results from aggregate 2009 student surveys of 9,553 secondary students that was done under the auspices of the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth show that Westchester students are using alcohol and marijuana at a higher rate than they reported in 2007 surveys. In regards to marijuana, this increase mirrors the latest results of the Monitoring The Future, 2010 survey which shows marijuana use increasing among teens. An increase in prescription drug use, especially pain killers is also being reported.

These factors could result in a very dangerous combination that makes Westchester teens particularly vulnerable to all the dangers associated with spring break. Westchester teens have felt their usual stress during the past few months and for many that level of stress has been exacerbated by the repeated school closings and delays. Given all this information, it is possible that these “stressed out” students would be more likely to use alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs during a spring break vacation.

According to CSAP, “the best way for parents to ensure that their teens enjoy a safe and responsible spring break is to discuss rules and expectations beforehand. While many parents make it clear what they expect of their children, other parents may not have had this important conversation with their teens. They may even feel uncomfortable or unsure of how to approach the subject. They may not realize that spring break is often synonymous with alcohol abuse and other risky and/or illegal behaviors. Or, they may not be aware of how much they influence their teens' lives. Discussing their concerns and making their expectations clear is one of the most effective ways parents can influence their child not to use drugs or alcohol. Spring break is a great time to have this discussion again.”

They go on to say “ If you are a parent of a teen "spring breaker," be sure

to instill in your teen the dangers and risks that are involved in an unsupervised trip. It is important to let teens know that they are encouraged to develop their independence but that independence comes with responsibilities. Explain to them that while you trust them, you still worry about their safety and expect them to follow the same rules of behavior that are expected from them at home.”

Monitoring the Future

Several important findings come out of this year’s Monitoring the Future study, the 36th annual, national survey of American teens in a series that began in 1975. It measures the use of drugs and alcohol in 8th grade, 10th grade and 12th grade.

- Marijuana use, which had been rising among teens for the past two years, continues to rise again this year.
- Ecstasy use, which fell out of favor in the early 2000s as concerns about its dangers grew, appears to be making a comeback this year.
- Alcohol use, and, specifically, occasions of heavy drinking, continues its long-term decline among teens into 2010, reaching historically low levels.

Marijuana

The use of marijuana rose for all prevalence periods this year (lifetime, past year, past 30-days, and daily in the past 30-days) in 8th, 10th and 12th grades. For the three grades

combined, all of these one-year increases are statistically significant. "Though this upward shift is not yet very large, its duration and pervasiveness leave no doubt in our minds that it is real," said Lloyd Johnston, the principal investigator of the study. "Perhaps the most troublesome part of it is that daily use of marijuana increased significantly in all three grades in 2010." The results showed that about one in sixteen 12th graders today uses marijuana on a daily or near-daily basis.

Both perceived risk and disapproval continued to decline in all three grades this year. The debate occurring about medical marijuana in many states can influence students to think that marijuana is a safe drug.

Ecstasy

The use of ecstasy has increased in the past year. "There may well be a generational forgetting of the dangers of ecstasy as newer cohorts of youth enter adolescence. They have heard less about the dangers of the drug than did their predecessors," Johnston said, "because they were quite young

when the original ecstasy epidemic occurred."

Alcohol

In general there has been a long-term decline in teen use of alcohol going back to the 1980s. It continued into 2010, when 30-day prevalence for the three grades combined fell significantly. For 12th graders 2010 marks the lowest level of alcohol use since the study's inception in 1975. For 8th and 10th graders it marks the lowest point since these grades were first included in the study in 1991.

Unfortunately, a survey done of Westchester County youth does not reflect the declines seen nationwide. A 2009 survey showed an increase in the use of alcohol by 10th and 12th graders when compared to a survey done in 2007.

Prescription Drugs

After marijuana, prescription drugs account for the most abused drugs for 12th graders. Non-medical use of Aaderall and over-the counter cough medications are also high for this group. The use of prescription pain killers is also increasing.

Upcoming Events

April 11 5:45 to 9:25pm

Family U

New Rochelle High School

Presentations:

Parenting Today's Teenagers

Anthony Wolf, Ph D

The Power of Acceptance

Ty Sells

Improve Communication in the

Latino Family

Leo Lederman

10 Seconds Can Change A Life

Bobby Petrocelli

Contact: 365-4728

April 11 7:00pm

Ardsley-Atria Woodlands

How To Raise A Teenager

Scott Fried

Contact: MatrogA@ardsleyschools.org

April 12- 6 to 9pm

Family U

Fox Lane High School

Presentations:

Bullyproof Your Child

Joel Haber, PhD

Bullied

Jamie Nabozny

Game Within The Game

Heidi Michaels

Contact: 234-3227