
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, October, 2012

Beginning Another Year



Many local coalitions dedicated to raising awareness about underage drinking and drug use, are busy planning activities that will be held throughout the year. Family Universities are scheduled, Red Ribbon week is being celebrated throughout the county and other special events are being planned for the spring.

Westchester County is very fortunate to have so many communities who have substance abuse prevention coalitions funded by federal Drug Free Community grants, including the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth. This organization serves as an umbrella organization for all the groups in the county that are concerned with underage drinking and drug use.

This organization holds meetings the first Thursday of each month, and usually over 20 coalition coordinators regularly attend representing their community. If your community has a coalition and does not currently attend this meeting or wants to start a coalition, please contact me for more information at pwarble@sacorp.org or 332-1300.
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6 Skill Sets Every Child Needs, To Guard Against Addiction

The following is an article written by David Sack, MD who is board certified in addiction psychiatry and addiction medicine. Dr. Sack served as a senior clinical scientist at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) where his research interests included affective disorders, seasonal and circadian rhythms, and neuroendocrinology. This article is printed on <http://blogs.psychcentral.com>.

Addicts aren't the only ones who are haunted by the shame of addiction. Parents are often plagued with worry: "If only I had been a better parent, maybe none of this would've happened."

Addiction is not parents' fault (about half the risk is genetic), but you can influence the course of your child's life by helping them develop the skills that protect against addiction.

#1 Coping Skills

One of the most important goals in treating addiction is equipping addicts with effective coping skills. The skills they learned in childhood might have been tempered by difficult life events, or perhaps they never developed appropriate coping mechanisms at all.

In either case, a need to self-medicate anger, disappointment and other difficult emotions is one of the most common reasons people turn to drugs and alcohol.

By learning how to cope with the full range of emotions – both the ones that feel good and the ones that feel miserable – children become resilient. Coping skills can be as basic as proper self-care (diet, sleep and exercise) or healthy distraction (talking to a friend or taking a walk), or they can be as complex as learning to differentiate between the things we can control and those we cannot.

#2 Social Skills

Human beings crave connection with other human beings. Studies show that social skills are essential for children to make friends, do well in school, and cope with life's ups and downs. Those who aren't able to lean on others for support are at greater risk of anxiety, depression and substance abuse.

Talking to children about other people's feelings, beliefs and desires helps build empathy, a fundamental tool for social interaction. This dialogue can begin as early as age two or three by describing the way characters in books or television shows might be feeling in a given situation and how they might deal with those feelings. Skills such as appropriate eye contact, sharing, taking turns, active listening and assertive communication can also be taught directly and through role modeling.

#3 Life Skills

It's surprising how many people arrive in drug rehab with minimal life skills. They haven't balanced a checkbook, prepared a basic meal or washed their own laundry, and it shows in their confidence and ability to function each day. While young children wouldn't be expected to have mastered these skill sets, the groundwork can be put in place early on.

School doesn't always equip children with the real-world skills they will need to navigate adolescence and adulthood. Parents play

a critical role in teaching their children healthy study habits, money management, cleaning their room, staying organized and creating a daily routine.

#4 Emotional Regulation Skills

Poor impulse control and a need for immediate gratification are strongly correlated with addiction. Although these qualities are normal at certain developmental stages, most children begin to use self-regulation skills without outside intervention. Those who have an extreme or persistent lack of self-control are at higher risk of bullying, academic difficulties, substance abuse and other problem behaviors.

Studies show that self-regulation skills in kindergarten predict literacy, vocabulary and early mathematics skills and are important for social development. Taking a time out, labeling and validating a child's feelings (both pleasant and unpleasant), and offering positive feedback for appropriate behavior are all useful strategies that aid in responding to emotions appropriately.

Harsh discipline, yelling and spanking, on the other hand, do not teach self-regulation. It is also important for parents to consistently set limits and enforce consequences so that children understand the expectations.

#5 Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking encourages children to think for themselves

rather than giving in to peer pressure. Schools are effective at teaching children what to think but not necessarily how to think. Starting as early as kindergarten, parents can help their children develop these skills by asking open-ended questions and working through a variety of possible solutions. After a decision is made, it can be helpful to reflect on it and ask your child what they might do differently next time.

#6 Distress Tolerance Skills

Many of the most dreaded behaviors that arise in children, including drug use, are the result of mismanaged stress. While distress tolerance skills alone will not prevent addiction, they do empower children to sit with their emotions without trying to escape or numb them.

One of the greatest disservices modern parents do to their children is getting in the way of the child's innate learning process. "Helicopter parenting" – the increasingly common practice of hovering over children so they don't get hurt or have to face problems – has contributed to a society that values immediate gratification over resilience. By intervening in arguments between a child and their friends or doing a tough homework assignment for their child, for example, parents deprive their child of valuable lessons and the skills to cope with stress, as well as the confidence boost that goes along with each small success.

Instead, let your kid be a kid. Life is full of moderate stressors that

encourage the development of new skills and provide a sense of mastery. You can supplement this process by introducing your child to novel experiences like making a new friend or trying a new game and allowing them to work through problems on their own.

All of these skill sets can be gained through a combination of experiences at school, explicit teaching and, most importantly, parental role modeling. If you accept accountability for your own feelings, provide plenty of praise and support without overprotecting, and avoid using drugs or alcohol yourself, you can put your child in the best possible position to avoid addiction and other serious problems later on.

Westchester County Substance Abuse Prevention Community Coalitions

There are many different substance abuse prevention organizations in communities throughout Westchester County that address concerns about underage drinking and drug use. In addition, there is an umbrella organization in the county called the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth.

Most communities have some kind of a prevention initiative. There are school affiliated groups such as a PTA committee, municipal affiliated groups such as a Youth Council and groups that involve individuals from many different areas (sectors) of the community (police, business, clergy etc.) There are also municipal and non-profit agencies that provide substance abuse prevention services and activities.



The federal Office of National Drug Control Policy provides funding through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for Drug Free Community Coalition (DFC) grants. The purpose of this funding is to bring together diverse sectors of the community to prevent and reduce underage drinking and youth substance abuse.

The availability of these funds has resulted in an increase in the number of coalitions in Westchester and the coalitions becoming more structured and formalized. There has also been a tremendous expansion in activities. Examples include: Public Service Announcements in movie theaters and on local television featuring local students; posters on train platforms and bus shelters; programs, panels, and speakers for teens and parents; training for health care providers; compliance checks and responsible beverage server trainings; prescription drug take-back days; and substance free recreational activities for youth.

Many community coalitions now have a paid coordinator who works with members of the community including parents, school representatives, law enforcement personnel, businesses, religious leaders, health providers and other community members and organizations who are working at the local level to make their communities safer, healthier and drug-free. If your community does not have an active group concerned about youth substances abuse prevention, the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free youth is able to provide guidance to start or re-activate a local group.

In addition to having individual communities involved in pro-active prevention activities, (the county-wide umbrella organization that is supported by federal grants), the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth, is an important, supportive resource for local coalitions. This group holds meetings on the first Thursday of the month. During these meetings there are a variety of presentations for coalition leaders including information on current trends, the latest research related to underage drinking and drug use, parents' attitudes toward underage drinking and drug use, and other common issues of concern.

In the past year the presentations included information on the reliability of drug testing, "medical" marijuana, gambling, and media advocacy. In addition, the Westchester Coalition has held a Youth Leadership Conference for middle and high school students and also organized trainings for the faith community, school personal, law

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enforcement, and emergency medical technicians. This group also organized a project that sent postcards to everyone in the county who has a child in the middle or high schools entitled, *If It's Not Your Kid, Whose Kid Is It?* The Westchester Coalition also spearheaded a "Marijuana Prevention" rally for students and coalition leaders on April 20 at the Westchester County Center. A month later Jack Claypoole, who was then the Associate Deputy Director for the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, speaking at the same venue, gave an energizing and inspiring talk about the positive and lasting impact coalitions can have in their communities to over 150 coalition members.

Currently, as far as can be determined, the following communities have active coalitions making a positive impact on their communities.

- Ardsley-Supporting Ardsley Youth and Families (SAYF)
- Bedford, Lewisboro. Pound Ridge Drug Abuse Prevention Council
- Blind Brook Coalition

- Briarcliff Manor Community Coalition
- Cortlandt Community Coalition
- Croton Community Coalition
- Harrison Youth Council
- Larchmont/Mamaroneck RADAR
- Mount Kisco Drug Abuse Prevention Council
- Mount Vernon Community That Cares
- North Castle Community Coalition
- Ossining Communities that Cares
- Peekskill Agencies Together
- Pelham PACT (Parents and Community Together) Coalition
- Port Chester Cares Community Coalition
- New Rochelle FOCUS, (Families Organized to Curb the Use of Substances)
- Chappaqua, R21K
- Somers Drug Abuse Prevention Council

- Yorktown Alliance for Safe Kids (ASK)
- White Plains Cares
- Yonkers Drug-Free Communities Coalition

If there are other communities that are not listed here that have coalitions please let us know so they can be added to the list. In addition, if you have a substance abuse prevention initiative in your community, please consider attending the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth meetings on the first Thursday of the month at 11am to 12:30 at Student Assistance Services, 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown. Not only will it be informative and educational, but these meetings also offer coalition leaders an opportunity to network, solve problems and learn from one another. Join us so we can all make Westchester County a safer place for all our residents.

Student Assistance Services
 660 White Plains Road
 Tarrytown, New York 10591