
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591 June, 2020

New Normal

As we all adjust to what is being referred to as the “new normal”, we are all having challenges and hope for better times soon.

Although most adults have never experienced something like the pandemic, we have a longer view of challenging events that have occurred to us both personally and in a more macro way like an economic crisis, loss of a job, or death of a close friend or relative. This gives adults more perspective and a longer time to build resilience and develop coping strategies to weather this and other storms.

Teens on the other hand are experiencing the pandemic without that longer view of surviving, coping, and moving forward. And, given what we know about brain development, teens are experiencing the new challenges in a very emotional way.

The role of parents is so important during this time. Help your teens by being a good listener and communicator, be understanding, support them, and most importantly be a good role model and show them safe and effective coping skills so your teen can adapt to the “new normal” and move forward in a positive way.

Taking care of yourself is an important first step.

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Parenting Through This Difficult Time

Parenting Through This Difficult Time The Covid-19 pandemic and its related consequences of unemployment, changes in the amount of parent child contact, increased alcohol misuse, a new spike in overdoses, isolation, stress, depression, domestic violence, and food insecurity, (to name just a few) combined with the current protests and demonstrations make this one of the most challenging times to parent teens.

Some parents are being asked to respond to situations that they have never encountered before, are unprepared for, and now have to explain to their adolescent. Others are responding to familiar stressful situations but have not had to respond to the volume and intensity of so many stressful situations all at the same time.

How parents respond to today's situations can have a lasting impact on a child's social and emotional well-being. There is no such thing as a "perfect parent" but the research is clear that parent role modeling and communication are major factors in school success, substance use, peer relationships, mental health, and many other important areas. How your teen sees you respond to the news, uncertainty, disappointment, unfairness, loss, and other stressful situations can provide a "roadmap" for them.

When a parent can't respond in a healthy way, it is critical to communicate to a teen that they are or were not able to respond in a healthy way at the time. At the very least, identifying an unhealthy response will let your teen know that the parent's response was shouldn't be modeled and that the parent values emotional honesty and not denying, justifying, or glorifying unhealthy behaviors. A conversation on healthy alternatives will be helpful along with an admission that it's not always easy to choose a healthy alternative when stressed or upset. This honest communication will make it easier for your teen to share their unhealthy behaviors and their possible challenges in finding healthy ways to cope now and in the future. This month's newsletter will provide some specific strategies for parents to help teens cope with this difficult time.

1. **Be aware of your feelings**, the feelings of other adults in the house, and how those feelings are being or not being expressed in the eyes of your teen. By telling your teen how you are feeling, you are demonstrating that you have a range of feelings and that is important for family members to talk about feelings. Linking feelings to incidents and behaviors is also helpful. Telling a teen, "I was so frustrated that I was on hold for 20 minutes and then so disappointed and angry that the person couldn't provide the information I needed" demonstrates that there are situations beyond your control and behaviors of others that can cause upset.

2. If you are not pleased with how you or others in the house are feeling and expressing feelings, **get help** from a professional or a parent support group.

3. **Know your teen**. How are they doing in school? What is the quality and quantity of their eating, sleeping, exercising, peer contact, their use of substances including caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, over the counter and prescription

medications, and other substances? The more specific the question, the more specific the answer! For example, asking, "How are you sleeping?" can be answered with "Fine." Asking, what time did you try to go to sleep, how long did it take to fall asleep, did you wake up during your sleep, were you able to fall back to sleep, what time did you wake up", will provide information that may alert you to your teen's level of anxiety, depression, or some other issue. .

4. Ask how your teen is feeling. To prevent the answer of "fine" ask "scaling" questions such as "On a scale of 1-10 how was your day?" If the answer is a '4' ask, "What happened or didn't happen that prevented it from being a '6'?" This will help teens better connect situations and behaviors to feelings.

5. Validate their feelings, but don't assume that you understand. Instead, gently probe to learn the specifics that lead to the emotions. For example, if you explain that: you were frustrated by being on hold for 20 minutes because you choose to make the call instead of starting dinner, didn't think you would be on hold for so long; knew while you were holding that you would have to rush to prepare dinner; that you were disappointed because you really needed the information to decide on which cell phone plan was needed; and you were angry because the website stated to call for more information and you were following directions but not getting the anticipated outcome, you provide a more detailed example of connecting feelings with thoughts, behaviors, and situations.

6. Brainstorm possible solutions for changing behaviors and situations that can be changed, and healthy coping strategies for situations that can't be changed. In the example above, anticipating that you might be on hold, putting the phone on speaker, and doing a task to prepare dinner while on hold might reduce the frustration of having to

rush. Asking the agent if there is another person or place to get the needed information might lessen the disappointment and result in not being angry because the needed information is obtained. A relaxation exercise such as deep breathing, focusing on a pleasurable memory, or a few "jumping jacks" might also help with the anger. "How to Help Your Kids Handle Disappointment" by Christina Frank in the Child Mind Institute Newsletter writes that it is important to "Avoid false reassurances - you don't want to give your child unrealistic ideas about what the future will hold, since right now we just don't know when things like school will resume (or what they'll look like when they do). Carey Werley, LCSW states," It's reasonable to emphasize that while we don't know when or how it will happen, eventually our current circumstance will change. They will see friends again and enjoy the activities they are missing right now and there's still a lot to look forward to." Werley encourages adults to, "Share your own past experiences of change and uncertainty, including how you dealt with those challenges and what the results were." While one of the most challenging aspects of this difficult time is the feeling and reality of not having control over when schools will re-open, what the summer will look like, when the economy will improve, when it will be safe to gather with others, etc., it is important to realize that almost everyone has some control over how they're going to spend their day and how they are going to find some time to take care of themselves in a healthy way. The article concludes with the advice from psychologist Dr. Madeline Levine "that kids have to learn how to live with disappointment. Remind your kids of things they've tolerated before whether it was not being cast in the school play, getting a lower-than-expected grade, or losing a big game. Let them know that even though this situation is different, they can use some of the same skills to get through".

Tuesday Talks About Teens

Student Assistance Services Corporation is launching a Tuesday series for parents called Tuesday Talks About Teens. Every Tuesday beginning on **June 9th, from 12:00 noon until 12:30 PM** a speaker will provide practical strategies for parents of teens on topics that can be challenging for parents. The format will include a 15-20 minute presentation on the topic followed by 10-15 minutes of questions and answers. Parents will be able to participate in the zoom talk anonymously. They will be able to view the speaker and any materials but will have their audio muted and not be able to see other participants on the talk. Questions will be through the chat function to the speaker. The kick off talk will address the topic, "**Your Teen's Changed Sleep Pattern.**" The talk will focus on how the school closure impacted teen sleep and how to help teen's re-establish a healthy pattern. The presenter is Carolyn D'Agostino, LCSW, the Student Assistance Counselor at Horace Greeley HS in Chappaqua, former Student Assistance Counselor at Gorton HS in Yonkers, and licensed clinical social worker with over 20 years of experience working with adolescents. Each week a different topic of interest to many parents will be presented. The June 16th talk will focus on Teen Vaping.

To access the talks by zoom click on: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81069772570pwd=RmhER0dwUIJPMFRoMGkyK1NTazRpZz09>

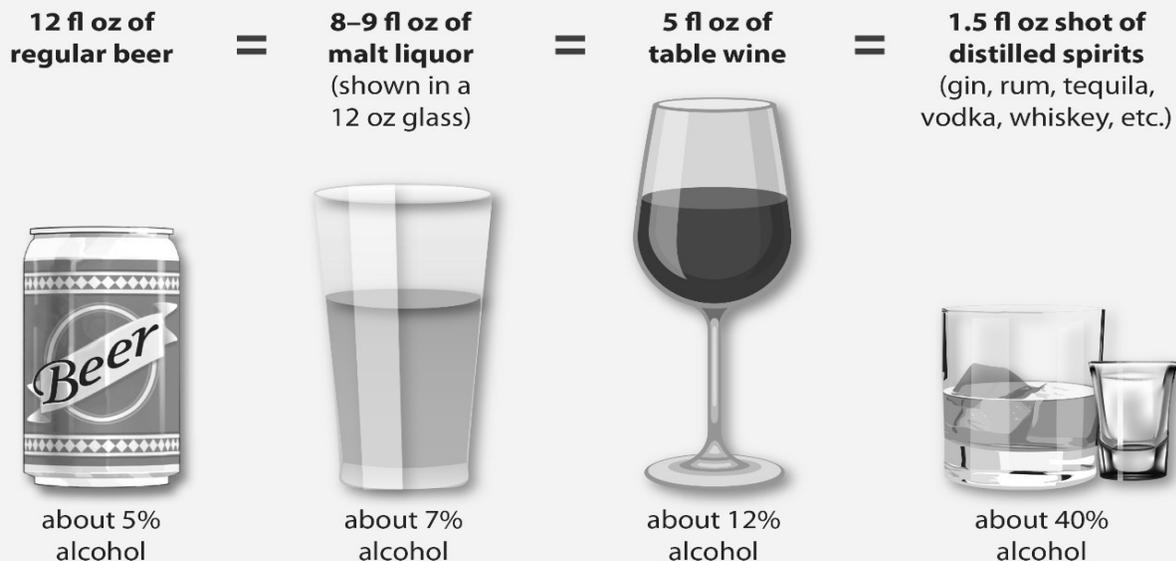
Meeting ID: 810 6977 2570, Password: 565661,
One tap mobile:+19292056099,,81069772570#,,1#,565661# Dial: 1 929-205-6099

Parent Alcohol Use

As mentioned in the April newsletter, alcohol sales have increased dramatically during the Covid-10 pandemic. During the week ending March 21st, off-premise alcohol sales were up 55% and online sales were up 243% compared to last year, according to data reported by Nielsen, an international measurement and data analytics company. According to Dr. George Koob, Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), "alcohol has the potential to further complicate the COVID-19 pandemic...excessive alcohol consumption may not only influence COVID-19 susceptibility and severity, but the broad effects are also likely to lead to excessive consumption."

According to the "[Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020](#)," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture, moderate drinking is up to 1 drink per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men.

What Is a Standard Drink?



Each beverage portrayed above represents one standard drink (or one alcohol drink equivalent), defined in the United States as any beverage containing .6 fl oz or 14 grams of pure alcohol. The percentage of pure alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol), varies within and across beverage types. Although the standard drink amounts are helpful for following health guidelines, they may not reflect customary serving sizes.

During this time when teens have more contact with parents, many are seeing parents use alcohol to deal with despair, anger, boredom, frustration, stress, and in some cases, in "virtual" or other social gatherings. Recent NY Times articles mentioned "Quarantinis" and "Walktail Parties" as recent examples of Covid-19 drinking behaviors. The current situation necessitates a reminder of the impact of parent alcohol use and not necessarily alcohol use disorder on teens.

Many research studies have documented that parental drinking behaviors are a key factor in adolescent drinking behaviors. For example, adolescents are less likely to drink heavily if they live in homes where parents have specific rules against drinking at a young age and also drink moderately. (van der Vorst, H.; et al. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2006) A current article on the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) website discusses the relationship of parent attitudes and behaviors on children.

But even if a parent uses alcohol, there may be ways to lessen the likelihood that your child will drink.

Some suggestions:

- If it is safe for you to use alcohol at all, use alcohol moderately.
- Don't communicate to your child that alcohol is a good way to handle problems. For example, don't say, "I had a rotten day. I need a drink."

- Let your child see that you have other, healthier ways to cope with stress, such as exercise; listening to music; or talking things over with your spouse, partner, or friend.
- Don't tell your teens stories about your own drinking or drug use in a way that conveys the message that substance use is funny, cool, or doesn't have negative consequences.
- Never drink and drive or ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking.

If and when you entertain or socialize with other adults, make sure alcohol-free beverages and food are also part of the gathering. If anyone drinks too much at your gathering, this can be a "teachable moment" with your teens where you can explain your concern. If the gathering is in-person make arrangements for anyone who has had too much to drink to get home safely.

The odds of a teenager getting drunk repeatedly is twice as great if they have seen their parents under the influence, even if only a few times.

For parents who do not use alcohol, their teens are more likely to also not use. Discussing reasons not to use and expressing negative feelings and attitudes about alcohol and other substance use will at the very least make your teen think twice about using them.

Coronavirus resources for information and and help

- The Westchester County Department of Community **Mental Health** (DCMH) recognizes that this can be a stressful time for many people. If you are experiencing anxiety or stress that has begun to affect your daily life and you feel you need support, call DCMH at (914) 995-1900 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. To send a text message, use #914-461-7281. DCMH can provide supportive counseling and refer you to longer term services if you need it. [Additonal DCMH information and updates.](#)
- New Yorkers can also call the COVID 19 Emotional Support Hotline at 1-844-863-9314 for mental health counseling.

The thought of having had family members exposed, or being exposed to a virus yourself can create feelings of uncertainty, fear or anxiety. If you have specific health-related questions there are people you can contact.

- People under self-quarantine, or exposure to a known case, can call the Westchester County **Health** Department at (866) 588-0195. Updates are available from the County and can be accessed by clicking on [Health Department on COVID-19.](#)
- Westchester County residents who want COVID-19 Information can also call 211, where contact specialists can provide assistance.
- The NYS Department of Health COVID-19 Hotline is (888) 364-3065.

If your family can benefit from **food** resources the following websites can be helpful:

<https://info.feedingwestchester.org/drive-thru-food-distribution>

<https://feedingwestchester.org/find-help/mobile-food-pantry-schedule/>