
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, March, 2006

New Concerns



The past few months my colleagues at SAS and I have attended several conferences.

One of them had a workshop on the research that shows a connection between eating disorders and substance abuse. The information that we received is the basis for the article that is included in this issue.

I know that the issue of eating disorders is a concern for everyone dealing with young people. Another issue that is being covered is the emergence of “teen hangout” sites on the Internet. The most popular, www.myface.com was created in 2003 and currently has 58 million users who are primarily teens and college students.

Many educators, law enforcement officials and parents have not known too much about these sites until recently. However, concerns are emerging about the safety and appropriateness of pictures and information that is being posted on these sites.

Eating Disorders and Substance Abuse

Where there is smoke there is probably fire.

The first comprehensive examination of the link between substance abuse and eating disorders, *Food For Thought: Substance Abuse and Eating Disorders* was published in 2003 by the Center for Alcohol and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University. The study shows that up to one-half of individuals with eating disorders abuse alcohol or illicit drugs, compared to nine percent of the general population. Conversely, up to 35 percent of alcohol or illicit drug abusers have eating disorders compared to three percent of the general population.

“This lethal link between substance abuse and eating disorders sends a signal to parents, teachers and health professionals—where you see the smoke of eating disorders, look for the fire of substance abuse and vice versa.”

Although individuals with eating disorders are not only woman, the majority are and Joseph A. Califano, CASA president remarked, “For many young women, eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia are joined at the hip with smoking, binge drinking and illicit drug use. This lethal link between substance abuse and eating disorders sends a signal to parents, teachers and health professionals—where you see the smoke of eating disorders, look for the fire of substance abuse and vice versa.”

The CASA report found that anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are the eating disorders most commonly linked to substance abuse and identifies the shared risk factors and shared characteristics that occur in both disorders.

Shared Risk Factors

- Occur in times of transition or stress
- Common brain chemistry
- Common family history
- Low self esteem, depression, anxiety, impulsivity
- History of sexual or physical abuse
- Favorable parental attitudes towards substance use and low monitoring of children's activities
- Unhealthy peer norms and social pressures
- Susceptibility to messages from advertising and entertainment media

Shared Characteristics

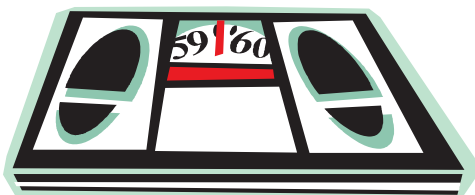
- Obsessive preoccupation, craving, compulsive behavior, secretiveness, rituals
- Experience mood altering effects.
- Linked to other psychiatric disorders, suicide
- Challenging to treat, life threatening
- Chronic diseases with high relapse rates
- Require intensive treatment.

CASA reports that individuals with eating disorders are most likely to use the following substances to suppress appetite, increase metabolism, purge unwanted calories and self-medicate negative emotions.

- caffeine, including coffee and diet drinks

- alcohol
- diuretics
- laxatives
- emetics
- amphetamines, including diet pills
- cocaine
- heroin
- cigarettes

According to the National Eating Disorder Association, although eating disorders are more likely to affect females than males, about 20-25 percent of young people affected by eating disorders are males. Generally, the males who develop eating disorders are trying to qualify to participate in a sport like wrestling which has weight restrictions.



CASA expressed concern in their report about the vulnerability of children to try to attain an unrealistic body image. The report found that woman's magazines contain ten times more advertisements and articles related to weight loss than men's magazines. According to Joseph Califano, president of CASA, "The average American woman is 5'4" and weighs about 140 pounds, but the average model that purportedly epitomizes our standard of beauty is 5'11" and weighs 117."

Other findings from the CASA report:

- Middle school girls who diet more than once a week are more likely to become smokers.
- Girls with eating disorder symptoms are almost four times more likely to use inhalants and cocaine.
- Over 12 percent of female high school students take diet pills, powders or liquids.
- Twelve percent of young woman consider smoking a weight reduction method.
- A student who has dieted in the sixth grade is more than 20 percent more likely to drink alcohol in the ninth grade.
- Adolescent girls are at the greatest risk for eating disorders and this age is also the time when they are at the greatest risk for substance abuse disorders.
- Girls who smoke to suppress their appetite are among the largest group of new nicotine addicts. Among white teenagers who smoke, girls are three times more likely to smoke to suppress their appetite than boys.

New Concerns About The Internet

Dangers on hang-out sites

Raising children has always been a hard job, but raising children in today's world presents many unique challenges that parents have not had to worry about in the past. One of these challenges is protecting children on the Internet.

One of the things that makes this issue so difficult is that most children know more about Internet technology than their parents. Secondly, the technology changes daily and it is hard for parents to keep up with the latest developments.

Detective Frank Dannahey, a computer crimes specialist from Connecticut speaks to parent groups about Internet safety. He tells parents who say they do not need to come hear him because they heard him last year that they need to come again. Issues and concerns change in a year and there are always new developments that parents need to know about when it comes to the Internet.

One of these latest developments are Internet "hangout" sites for teens. MySpace.com is the most popular teen website but there are other similar sites including Facebook.com, Friendster, and Xanga.com. Facebook.com is set up according to schools and registration for the high school Facebook.com is by invitation

only. A student needs to be invited to join by someone who's already registered at their school.

There are several concerns that parents, educators, and law enforcement officials have about these sites. The first is that these sites can put young people at risk to sexual predators posing as cyberspace friends. Some teens innocently post personal information about themselves that can include addresses and cell phone numbers. Also, many teens also include provocative photos and messages about themselves. A teen may not even have a page on the site, but their friends may include pictures of them on their profile.

In addition to worries about sexual predators, there are also concerns about the kinds of information that teens themselves are exposed to on the sites. These include the provocative photos but there is also widespread use of obscenities, and links to other questionable websites some of which contain pornographic material.

Teens also use a code language on the websites that can indicate sexual practices they are willing to engage in and the kinds and amount of alcohol or other drugs they use. At first glance, these words or phrases may seem innocuous to parents but a second look can reveal disturbing information. It is helpful for parents to get their own password and go on these sites so they can see the pictures and language that is used.

These sites can also be a place

where cyber bullying takes place. In some cases the site acts as the modern day equivalent of a rumor mill and the reputations of young people are at risk by others.

It is important for teens to understand that although the web is "world-wide," it is also very local. A local zip code or the name of a high school can be typed in by anyone who registers on the site and information is revealed about people living in that area.

Tips For Parents to Give Teens

- Never give out identifying information such as your name, address, school, or telephone number in online forums like chat rooms, blogs, or bulletin boards. Remember that once online, you are not completely anonymous
- Immediately tell your parents, guardian, or teachers if you are sent anything that makes you uncomfortable.
- Do not reply to "spam" messages.
- Never agree to meet anyone in person you have met online without telling your parent or guardian.



Tips For Parents

- Monitor the use of your children's use of the Internet. Know the amount of time they are on the Internet and what sites they are visiting. Most computers show what sites have been visited by clicking on the arrow at the end of the address bar. If that list is deleted, one might assume that the user is going to questionable sites.
- Internet safety experts advise that computers should be in "public" rooms in the house and not in children's rooms. If they are in your child's room, have the monitor face the door and agree that the child cannot change the screen once you approach the room.
- Speak to your children about safety issues on the Internet and make sure they understand that they should not give out any personal information.

Upcoming Events

March 28 **7:30pm**
Pelham High School,
Cafeteria C
Teens, Parents, Drugs and
the Law
Contact: 738-8182

April 4 **7:00pm**
Ossining High School
Safe Driving Night
Panel Presentation
Contact: 762-5760X325

April 4 **7:00-8:30pm**
LCBMS Cafe
Hearing Our Children:
The Parent Talk
Scott Fried
Contact: 245-1885X206

April 4 **6-10:00pm**
Travelers Rest, Yorktown
PAKT Conference
Keynote: Today's Kids-What
Works and What Doesn't
Anthony Wolf, Ph.D.
Multiple Intelligences
Ray Lillis
De-Stressing The Family
Wendy Kaufman
Contact: 245-3507

April 5 **3pm-7pm**
Town Hall Meeting at
The Armory, Mount Vernon
"Risky Business"
Underage Drinking and Violence
Mt Vernon CTC
Contact: 665-1057

April 6th **7:30 - 9:30 pm**
Hastings HS Auditorium
Dr. Jonathan Weinstein
"What You Don't Know About
Performance Enhancers
Contact: 478-6258

April 18
Blue Mountain MS/Hendrick
Hudson HS
Hearing Our Children: The Parent Talk
Scott Fried
Contact: 736-7454

April 18 **7:30pm**
Pelham High School,
Cafeteria C
Organized Youth Sports, Who Wins
Who Loses
Bob Bigelow, author of *Just Let The
Kids Play*
Contact: 738-8182

April 25 **6:30pm**
Family University, Harrison
Keynote: Loving Your Kid Without
Losing Your Mind, Michael Bradley
Contact: 630-3145