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# Parenting for Prevention

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Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591 October, 2005

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## New Beginnings

New books, new pens, blank pages that would be written on with meaningful notes, new clothes, and new shoes. Those were all the things I thought about when I was starting school.

This year would be the best! I would never be late with an assignment, I would take better notes and write better essays. Many times these positive thoughts actually did result in a new attitude and I actually followed through on some of my resolutions.

Students today report that they have many more concerns on their minds as they start school. They report feeling stress and pressure in many aspects of their school life. One of the emerging concerns is the competitive nature of sports in our area and worries that students may resort to the use of steroids and performance enhancing drugs to be successful athletes.

To address these concerns, Westchester County will be sponsoring a forum on this issue at the **Westchester County Center on November 2 at 7:00.** Plan now to have members of your PTA, coalitions, and other organizations attend this informative event.

*Patricia M. Warble, Editor*

## Expectations, Performance, And Stress

This time of year is an exciting time for most families. There is the wonderful sense of new beginnings in addition to feelings of anticipation and renewal. However, recent research indicates that students are finding this a stressful time as they anticipate the pressures and demands that they will confront during the coming year. Students feel pressure to succeed academically, to conform to what may be an unattainable body image, to excel in sports and to meet what may be the unrealistic expectations of their parents.

In the past, parents and educators have been worried about the use of alcohol and other drugs by students. Those concerns remain but in addition there are also concerns about ways students cope with expectations and pressures by using performance-enhancing products such as cold and pain remedies; steroids; diet substances; over-the-counter products and prescription medication.

### Alcohol/Drugs

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A study called The National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VIII: Teens and Parents, indicates that teens are more likely to smoke, get drunk and use illegal drugs if they are stressed, bored or have substantial amounts of spending money. This was conducted in cooperation with the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), and it is the first time that the survey measured the impact of these characteristics on teen substance abuse.

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### **Pressure/Disconnection**

Two additional research projects, one conducted by Daniel Kindlon, Ph.D. of Harvard University which is covered in his book, *Too Much of a Good Thing* and the other by Suniya S.Luthar, Ph.D. of Columbia University, have provided additional insights into this issue. Dr. Luthar's research has been published in the *Child Development* journal and is entitled *Privileged but Pressured? A Study of Affluent Youth*.

These research projects reveal disturbing trends. Historical data collected over the last three decades shows that teen suicide has tripled and depression, anxiety, and eating disorders have soared among teens and young adults. Harold Koplewiz, M.D. in his book, *More Than Moody*, discusses these issues in more depth.

Dr. Luthar's research concludes that there are two primary sets of risk factors for substance use that are relatively specific to affluent, suburban youth.

- Substance use was linked to "self-medicating" for depression and anxiety among affluent teens but not among inner-city students.
- The peer group in suburban schools seemed to endorse substance abuse among boys. Further, peer popularity was linked with high substance use among upper socioeconomic status boys, but not among inner-city boys, or either group of girls.

In an attempt to gain insight into these findings, members of the community, school administrators, clinical service providers, PTA representatives, parents and children were interviewed. The goal of the interviews was to gain insight into what was causing distress among teens. Insights gained from these various sources consistently pointed to two major causes of distress.

- The first was excessive achievement pressure stemming from parental emphasis on achievement and from internal striving for perfection.
- The second finding was that the young people felt a disconnection from their parents. The study by Dr. Luthar found that children from affluent families often have little or no after-school supervision by adults. In affluent homes, both parents may be involved in professional careers and are also involved in other activities. A home without supervision can provide the students with the temptation of experimenting with drugs or alcohol or participating in other risky behaviors.

An issue related to this is a newer trend that has been observed by substance abuse professionals. Some students are appropriately taking stimulant medication such as Ritalin and Adderol for attention deficit disorder (ADD). In fact, studies have shown that students with ADD who take these medications (as prescribed and moni-

tored by a physician) are less likely to develop substance abuse problems than students with ADD who do not receive proper treatment.

However, often teens are obtaining these medications illegally and using them inappropriately. These medications work as a stimulant and students are taking them to stay awake longer to do school work and/or to "workout" longer. This is another indication that students feel so much pressure to succeed academically and athletically that they are resorting to extreme means.

### **Body Image**

The concerns regarding body image can impact teens in different ways. There are issues related to taking substances that can make a teen thinner and substances that can enhance their muscles and add weight.

### **Steroids/Performance Enhancing Drugs**

This topic received national coverage all summer with information connecting well-known athletes with the use of steroids and other performance enhancing substances. Recently there has also been speculation about the role of these substances by baseball players have broken home-run records.

In a book entitled, *Let The Children Play*, Bob Bigelow, Tom Moroney and Linda Hill discuss the change in attitudes towards sports that has made it competitive for even the youngest participants. Sports that used to be fun and a release of energy have become another stressor for

children.

Given the fact that teens feel an increased pressure to succeed in sports, and it appears that their athletic role models use these substances, there is concern that the use of steroids and performance enhancing drugs is going to increase among this age group. Also, it is the nature of teens to feel invincible and be reluctant to believe the warnings about the use of performance enhancing substances.

In addition, the rewards for succeeding in a sport can be a huge financial windfall. The stakes are high in terms of college admissions and scholarships and the possibility of participating on a professional level.

### Diet

The use of diet pills, drinks and powders is another trend that concerns health professionals. The media promotes a female body image that is hard to attain with a healthy intake of calories. In order to achieve this lean look, young women are resorting to diet pills and supplements to keep their bodies thin.

One of the diet substances that was popular in the past years is ephedrine which was taken off the market several years ago. However, it is making a comeback in other forms. This plant extract is a stimulant which promotes weight loss but has many dangerous side effects. In the past, young women were primarily at risk for the use of diet pills and supplements. However, more young men are using these substances to control their weight. Usually the young

men are involved in a sport, like wrestling that requires them to meet a specific weight requirement.

### What Can Parents Do?

Every generation of parents has its own challenges and worries. However, the sociological and economic changes during the past years have put great pressure on parents and added a dimension to parenting that requires them to be vigilant, committed, resourceful, and flexible.

Many parents are working longer hours and children are involved in more activities so it is hard for families to find time to be together. In addition the media is having a more direct influence over our lives.

Although it may be difficult to work it into the family schedule, research done by the Center for Alcohol Substance Abuse (CASA) indicates that one of the most important things parents can do is to eat dinner with their children. In families where parents have dinner with their children on a regular basis, their children are protected from drug and alcohol use and other risky behaviors.

The research that was done by CASA was done specifically related to dinner, but if parents cannot do that, eating another meal or spending time with your children is also very valuable. Being with your children gives you an opportunity to observe them, communicate information and concerns and find out what is going on in their lives. It may

be hard to do but it is well worth the effort and is an investment in your children's future.

A good communication strategy to implement with teens are "I messages." They convey your thoughts in a respectful, non-judgmental manner. For instance, saying "**WHEN YOU** do not come home on time, **I FEEL** scared and worried **BECAUSE** I don't know where you are," is less likely to put your teen on the defensive. Parents can change the wording to reflect what is appropriate for their family.

It is also helpful to guide your teens to be good consumers. Helping teens decipher the ingredients on labels is educational and often surprising. It is important for children to understand the implications of taking a steroid or other supplements or using medications without a prescription. There is a misconception that if something is "natural" or legal then it is safe, but that is not necessarily true.

Looking for alternative ways to make healthy food choices can also be a helpful exercise for parents and their children. Look for alternatives to junk food and drinks. Food shopping with your teens can be an educational outing for the family.

Finally, examine your expectations for your children. Children need to be valued for who they are, not for what they can accomplish.

Community members can preview many different speakers and presentations that they may want to bring to their communities. This year's fall programs are providing communities with an unusual opportunity to view some of the most prestigious presenters on drugs, alcohol and parenting in the country. Do not miss this opportunity.



This year five communities are holding events based on the original Family U model that was developed in Katonah-Lewisboro District. These educational evenings provide community members with a wonderful opportunity to experience a model they may want to recreate in their own communities.

**Upcoming Events**

**October 17** 7:00pm  
Harvey School  
Edward Hallowell, MD

*The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*  
Contact: 232-3161X144  
**October 17** 7:30pm  
Rye Middle School  
**Children, Money, & Values**  
Eileen Gallo and Jon Gallo  
Contact: 967-6100X7555

**October 18** 7:00pm  
Eastchester High School  
**Teens, Parents, Alcohol, Drugs and the Law**  
Contact: 793-6130X4259

**October 19** 7:30pm  
Pelham Memorial High School  
**Pelham University**  
*I Never Would Have Talked To My Parents That Way!*  
Anthony Wolf, Ph.D.  
Contact: 738-6941

**October 25** 7:00pm  
The Masters School  
Anthony Wolf, Ph.D.  
Contact: 479-6568

**November 2** 7:00pm  
Westchester County Center  
**Westchester County Forum on Steroids and Performance Enhancing Products**  
Contact: 995-4115

**November 3** 6:00pm  
Fox Lane Middle School  
**Bedford Central Family U**  
*Clueless, What Your Kids Know and You Don't*, Mike Nerney  
*Developing Children of Character*, Joel Haber  
*Lets Talk About Money*  
Julia Strayner & Cathy Tanzilli

Contact: 234-3227

**November 9** 7:00pm  
New Rochelle HS Auditorium  
**Teens, Parents, Alcohol, Drugs and the Law**  
Contact: 632-5000x4728

**November 9** 6:00pm  
John Jay Middle School  
**Family University**  
*The Pressured Child*, Michael Thompson Ph.D.  
*With Respect To Sex*, Maria Simonetti, Tom Mahoney  
Contact: 234-3227

**November 16** 5:45pm  
Byram Hills High School  
**Byram Hills Family Symposium**  
*New Rules How To Get Your Kids To Listen*, Ron Taffel  
*Healthy Workout*, Eric Small, MD  
Rye Town Players  
Contact: 273-5363

**November 16** 6:00pm  
Horace Greeley High School  
**Chappaqua Family Forum**  
*Risky Behavior and the Human Brain*, Marilyn Brockwood  
Contact: 238-5778

**November 19** 8:00am  
Pelham Middle School Library  
**Pelham University**  
Rob Spear  
Part I: For Fathers Only  
*Smooth Sailing at the Office-Uncharted Waters at Home*  
Part II: For All Parents and Community Members  
**10:00am**  
*How To Give Up Control While*

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