

Kennedy Connections



Keeping Kennedy High School parents connected to students, staff, and each other

October is National Substance Abuse Prevention Month!

Substance Abuse At a Glance

According to SAMHSA,

- ◆ About 10 million people ages 12-20 have reported drinking alcohol in the past month.
- ◆ Approximately 23 million Americans are users of illicit drugs such as marijuana and prescription medications.
- ◆ Almost 18 million Americans are dependent on or have abused alcohol.

This issue of Kennedy High School's parent newsletter is focused on substance abuse prevention. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA, has declared October as National Substance Abuse Prevention Month. The goal of SAMHSA is to



focus public health efforts on the nation's behavioral health. Our goal as par-

ents is to ensure that our youth lead healthy and productive lives, as well as ensure safe and healthy communities. One key way of achieving this is stopping substance abuse before it begins.

Peer substance use in adolescence predicts use as an adult

For as long as we can remember, our children seem to always want to do what their friends are doing. From having the same toys to dressing the same way, children's peers can have an immense influence on their behaviors and interests. Even more so in adolescence, the crowd your child spends time with can have considerable impacts on his or her future, sometimes for better, and sometimes for worse. The use of substances in adolescence is a predictor of substance use in adulthood. Studies have shown that having peers who use drugs and

support their use is perhaps the greatest indicator of future use.

There are many reasons for this association. Adolescents who associate with users of drugs have more exposure to those substances, and therefore, more opportunities to use. Adolescents who use drugs also tend to hold more favorable attitudes towards substance use. These attitudes can influence their peers to experiment with substances as well. In a 2012 study by Piehler, et al., adolescent substance use and peer substance use were highly correlated when assessing use of al-

cohol, tobacco, and marijuana.

Have you discussed substance use with your child? The time is now to establish clear expectations of what is and is not okay regarding substances, particularly alcohol. This is especially important as our children undergo their high school career and go to college where they may be faced with situations involving substance use. Communication is key. Informing of the dangers of substance use, as well as alternatives to substance use will allow them to make smarter decisions for themselves and their future.

Certain parenting factors may increase success in the reduction of adolescent alcohol use

Signs your child may be using and/or abusing substances

(According to the Mayo Clinic)

- ◆ Problems at school: missing classes, drop in grades
- ◆ Physical health issues: lack of energy or motivation
- ◆ Neglected appearance
- ◆ Changes in behavior or relationships with family and friends

As a parent, you might be starting to think about how to talk to your child about alcohol. As they mature, alcohol could become a more prevalent issue in their lives. In a systematic study of literature in 2010, various parenting factors were studied compared with adolescent alcohol use. According to these longitudinal studies, certain parenting strategies were identified with reduced alcohol consumption in adolescents. Parents are being encouraged to implement some of these strategies with their

children.

Our children are affected not only by what we say, but what we do. Parental modeling of drinking has been associated with earlier initiation of drinking. It is also linked with increased use later in life. Parental involvement in their children's lives is found to be linked with delayed alcohol initiation. Studies also found that good general communication between parent and child is associated with lower levels of alcohol use as adolescents.

Spending time with your

child can increase your trust in one another and strengthen your parent-child bond. Using good communication to talk with them about alcohol use before they go to college can be potentially life-saving. Talking to your child about alcohol policies and responsible alcohol consumption can be very effective, but it is only one part of the story. It is also important that we model these responsible behaviors ourselves. Practicing behaviors we would wish our children to emulate can be truly effective.

Mental Health

Dual diagnosis (DD) is the occurrence of substance use disorders (SUD) and mental health disorders simultaneously in an individual.

Those who have mental health problems are more likely to have high-risk drinking levels. DD individuals have a more unique set of needs compared to those with mental health or substance problems alone. Because patients with mental health issues have high levels of apparent comorbidity, there is a need for substance abuse treatment providers to treat individuals with co-occurring problems. In their 2011 study, Cridland et al. assessed treatment outcomes in DD individuals and in those with substance use disorder only.

DD individuals reported having symptoms of depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide or attempted sui-

cide. Both DD and SUD individuals showed improvement in drug and alcohol related problems at follow-up time. However, DD individuals showed significantly less improvement than those with SUD only.

DD individuals also reported having higher substance craving levels at both intake and follow-up. It is possible that DD individuals require more efforts to improve, or they are not responding as well to the techniques employed by the program.

Many times mental health problems can be a precursor for substance abuse. Adolescents may turn to drugs and alcohol to get away from their problems or to try to cope with negativities in their lives. Parental communication is crucial in this case. Talk to

your child and let them know you are there for them in times of hardship and that there are safe and healthy ways to deal with the stresses of adolescence. Prevention will allow you and your child to deal with current issues in their lives and keep more serious problems from developing.



Prevention Resources

- ◆ **Too Smart To Start:** a resource for parents, educators, and youth to prevent underage drinking
<http://www.toosmartostart.samhsa.gov/Start.aspx>
- ◆ **Stop Underage Drinking 2014:** federal resources about underage drinking and ways to fight against the issue
<http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/>

