

# Parentally Speaking

A quarterly publication for parents in Middlesex County



Volume: I Issue: I Spring 2008

## Introducing "Parentally Speaking"

NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. is pleased to introduce a new quarterly newsletter: *Parentally Speaking*.

NCADD is the premier agency in this county for providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies. We deliver our messages of prevention through various community events, at schools and through groundbreaking town-hall meetings.

We already publish three newsletters that are primarily targeted to educators, governmental officials, and the

general public.

But for 22 years we have not, to date, spoken directly to parents in Middlesex County.

*Parentally Speaking* is a quarterly publication designed to bring news and useful information for parents and guardians whose students attend Middlesex County public and private schools.

We believe that *Parentally Speaking* will become a valuable tool that parents will use to communicate better with their children; understand the pitfalls of alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse; spot the type of signals their children provide when they are on a path to use and



abuse of drugs and alcohol; and much, much more.

So enjoy our first issue and let us know what you think.

Future issues of *Parentally Speaking* will be at least four pages and cover a variety of topics. Want something particular covered? Want to share an opinion? Drop us a note at [parentallyspeaking@ncadd-middlesex.org](mailto:parentallyspeaking@ncadd-middlesex.org)

## Getting Involved by Alison Birnbaum

Those of you with younger teens tell us you are preparing early for what lies ahead. And those of you already in the thick of parenting a high school student tell us you are wrestling with maintaining positive contact with your child while trying to set rules and limits.

Knowing what opportunities and challenges your children face when they navigate online or gather

with friends is the first step toward responsive parenting. Whenever I work with parents, there is considerable (and justified) concern about their child's privacy, particularly around written material. I, too, remember writing revealing notes to friends, and I would not have wanted my parents to read them.

However, participation on the Internet is less like a private diary or secret interaction with a friend, and more like

a public event. The fact that there are few if any parents in "cyberspace venues" (Facebook, MySpace, chat rooms) doesn't make it any less of a venue. Before my children leave for a concert, party, friend's house, mall, restaurant or any other venue, I ask questions to get an idea of exactly what dangers they might face. Knowing the right questions to ask depends on your

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level of familiarity with the destination. So if you want to know potential dangers of online venues, surf some of the popular social networking sites to see who is there and what they are doing. You can do the research without overstepping your child's privacy boundaries.

Also, if you suspect your child is taking risks that are affecting his or her mental health, friendship life, or school work, it is your responsibility to figure out how you can help. I have heard teens express anger about their parents checking up on them, and I have seen some teens continue risky behavior regardless of the parents' response. But by far the most common response that teens have is relief. (Of course, they will never express this directly to their parents!) I have heard many teens say what one young woman recently told me: "I actually am relieved that I'm grounded, because I was getting out of control and needed a break."

### Setting limits

How do you set rules without sounding like a

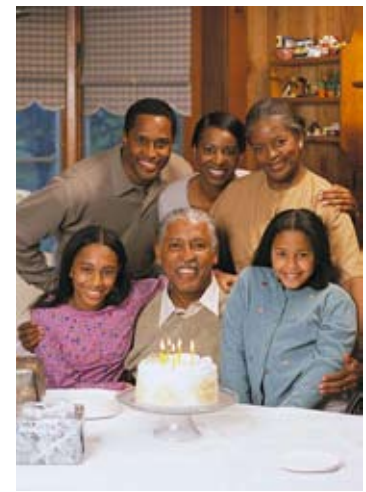
drill sergeant? No parent enjoys being an inquisitor or likes to see a teen stiffen with resentment when faced with "the questions," such as "Where are you going?," "What are you doing?," "Who will be there?" Here are several strategies to try:

1. Focus on the positive: "We've been a good team on other occasions. [Like when we worked on that science project together, worked on your tennis serve, etc.] Let's use our teamwork here to stay safe and healthy."
2. Discuss the interaction: "Hey, we always seem to end up here...given that I'm only doing my job, and every time you go out I will be asking questions, how can we make this go more easily between us?"
3. Use a sense of humor: "Ok, it's time for me to put on my 'dad' [or mom] hat. You know that means I have to ask the questions. . ."

*In upcoming issues we plan to continue to feature articles presented by Alison Birnbaum. Here is a little bit of information about the author: Alison Birnbaum, LCSW, has practiced psychotherapy in New York City and*

*Connecticut for 25 years. In her clinical work, she helps adults, adolescents, children, and their families with issues ranging from mental illness and substance abuse to divorce and emotional intelligence. Alison also works as a consultant to the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, offering expert advice on various media initiatives and contributing guest columns to TheAntiDrug.com. She was previously a member of the Media Campaign's Behavior Change Expert Panel (BCEP).*

*Article reprinted with permission from Alison Birnbaum and TheAntiDrug.com (go to <http://www.theantidrug.com>).*



Did you know that 80 percent of parents believe that alcohol and marijuana are usually not available at parties their teens attend?

Unfortunately, the reality is sobering —50 percent of teens who go to parties say that alcohol, drugs, or both are available.

Think you know your teen?

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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