

Parentally Speaking

A quarterly publication for parents in Middlesex County



Volume: I Issue: I Spring 2008

Welcome to "Parentally Speaking"

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Parentally Speaking*.

All of us at NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. are excited to be bringing this latest edition to our line-up of newsletters.

Parentally speaking is targeted primarily to parents and caregivers in Middlesex County. But we also hope to reach educators, government officials, service providers and anyone else who impacts the lives of our youth.

We hope that each issue will bring relevant and timely information you can use and/or

share. Because as far as we are concerned, it is always about conversation. We talk to you and hopefully you will talk to us.

We know that everyone is busy. There aren't enough hours in



the day. And we are aware how sometimes it's frustrating how few chances there are for you to have conversations about drugs and alcohol with your children. In our busy culture, with

families juggling the multiple demands of work, school, after-school activities, and religious and social commitments, it can be a challenge for parents and children to be in the same place at the same time.

We hope that *Parentally Speaking* will provide you with information you will use when you do speak with your children. And if you have thoughts, ideas, things you'd like to see us talk about. Whatever. Write to us. Because in case you haven't noticed, we like to communicate.

Some Relevant Information About Rx and OTC Drugs

Recreational use of legal prescription drugs is rapidly overtaking the illegal substance abuse issues parents are accustomed to worrying about - namely marijuana and alcohol.

The latest statistics regarding prescription drug abuse are alarming: 1 in 5 teens are abusing prescription drugs, according to the Partnership for a Drug Free America, quite possibly making these, rather than marijuana, the new gateway drugs. Moreover, 1 in 10 teens - that's more than 2 million nationwide - are getting

high and frequently overdosing on cheap, readily available, over-the-counter cough and cold remedies containing dextromethorphan, DXM.

DXM, a cough-suppressant ingredient, is something you would typically find in cough-control formulas of such well-known brands as Dimetapp, Robitussin, Sudafed as well as many other such products. Interestingly enough, many in the medical community do not think these cough and cold medicines are effective. Even the American Academy of

Pediatrics does not recommend the use of products that contain DXM. While these over-the-counter medications may control a cough, they don't cure the underlying illness.

The basic fact is that when taken in recommended dosages, these over-the-counter medications are safe. But when recklessly taken as if they were soft drinks, as kids are prone to do, these same products produce an often dangerous high, one that can cause fever, hallucinations, hypertension,

Continued on Page 2

If you would like to receive an alert about the latest issue of *Parentally Speaking*, just write to us at parentallyspeaking@ncadd-middlesex.org

Continued from Page 1

seizures, increase in heart rate and blood pressure, coma, brain damage or death.

Some steps are being taken to help stem this problem. Recently, federal regulations were passed and now require that drugstores keep allergy and cold products containing the decongestant pseudoephedrine - which can be used to produce methamphetamine, or crystal meth - behind the counter and maintain a registry of people who buy them. So far, this policy has not been applied to DXM.

But there is not much that can be done to legislate the misuse of prescription drugs. The problem is that it's their legal designation, as opposed to illegal street drugs, that leads teens to believe they are safe.



In fact, for over ten years now, drug manufacturers have been allowed direct-to-consumer advertising. As a result, highly impressionable adolescents have seen the hyped-up benefits of drugs like Prozac, Zoloft and Ambien, which are continually touted on television. On a daily basis, they see medical professionals liberally prescribing pharmaceuticals to their parents, and with more

frequency directly to the teens themselves, for a variety of afflictions such as attention deficit disorder, social phobia or general anxiety disorder.

We have now come to a point where popping a pill for whatever ails us is considered normal. When used as directed by a doctor, prescription medications are vital and necessary to combat all sorts of illness. The problem is that teens are taking pills at random. They're delving into medicine cabinets for their medications. They sneak into friends' parents' medicine cabinets and simply take prescribed medications from unsuspecting relatives. And, these kids are also buying pills from dealers at school or easily ordering them over the Internet.

So what can parents look for? Be alert to unusual behavior such as excessive sleeping, or a child who's gone from being outgoing and energetic to one who is very lethargic. Take note if your child suddenly shifts to different friends. But most importantly, parental prevention and intervention is paramount. Kids need parents, not friends. They need boundaries. They need reasons to say no.

Studies have shown that when you combine education and parental involvement, teen smoking has been down by 50 percent and the use of marijuana is down by 40 percent, all the past 10 years. The proof is right there - parental and community awareness, involvement and communication are key.

Parents need to educate themselves about the harmful effects of prescription drug abuse and DXM. Communicate with other parents and definitely talk to your teens about it - and do so frequently. Communicate expectations and reinforce your love for them daily. Toss unused drugs from old prescriptions or lock them away. Take regular inventory of your home's prescription and over-the-counter medications and keep them well out of your children's reach.

And keep in mind that the Internet has become a virtual pharmacy that is always stocked with addictive drugs, available 24X7 to any kid with a computer. So keep an eye on your kids when they surf the Net.

Although teens are turning away from street drugs, now there's a new threat and it's from the family medicine cabinet: The abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. Parents and caregivers are the first line of defense in addressing this troubling trend. To learn how to combat this new threat, please copy and paste the following URL into your browser: http://www.theantidrug.com/drug_info/prescription_dangers.asp

■ **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?

Getting Involved *by Alison Birnbaum*

I am sure that many of you are thoughtful in your parenting and are learning to communicate more effectively with your teens. 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 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>).

Staff

Steven G. Liga,
MSW, LSW, LCADC, CPS
CEO & Executive Director

Ezra Helfand, BA
Public Information Coordinator

Jacqueline Jackson, MBA
Financial Manager

East Brunswick Office

Alexandra Lopez, MA, LCADC, SAC
Program Director

Mara Carlin, BS
Education Coordinator

Dena Charbonneau, MSW, LSW, CPS
Prevention Educator

Padma Sonti Desai, MA
KIV Facilitators

Joseph Nelan
Administrative Assistant

Christina Rak-Samson, BA
Prevention Educator

Jackie Randazzo, BS
REBEL Coordinator

Jennifer Smith, MPH, CPS
Prevention Educator

Linda Surks, BS, APS
Coalition Coordinator

Jane White, BS
KIV Facilitator

Carteret Office

Lauren Balkan, MSW, LCSW
Program Director

Dara Ann Jarosz, BA
Administrative Coordinator

Joel Levy, M.Ed.
Youth Development Specialist

Lindsay Rich, MSW, LSW
Youth Development Specialist

Board of Trustees

President *Vice President*
Brian Rose Katherine Fallon

Treasurer *Secretary*
Susan Neshin, M.D. Marjorie Talbot

Past President
Karen Krenzel
Members

Mark Anderko
Sharon Campbell
Alexis Eventoff
Steven Polinski
George Rusuloj

Get Involved in Your Child's Life

Young people are much less likely to use drugs when they have positive activities to do and when caring adults are involved in their lives.

Get involved in your child's life by participating in his activities (e.g., volunteer in your child's classroom, attend his recital or play, help with his science project) and praising his accomplishments. Your participation and encouragement tell your child that these activities are worthwhile and may help him identify and pursue other positive activities as he gets older.

It's important to establish and maintain good communication with your child. Get into the habit of talking with your child every day. Building a close relationship with

her when she's young will make it easier for her to come to you when she has a problem and will help you become more sensitive to her mood changes. With a closer relationship to you, she'll be less likely to develop mental health problems and to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs.

And make sure you connect with other parents. Parenting isn't easy, but it's more manageable if you have a network of others who are going through the same experiences, even if your children are at different schools.



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.

NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc.
152 Tices Lane
East Brunswick, NJ 08816
732-254-3344
www.ncadd-middlesex.org

