SUBSTANCE ABUSE
DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

Using the attached resource flyer, diagnostic assessments can be sought through a number of public agencies in the local area. A diagnostic assessment is a critical step in confronting substance abuse at whatever stage of progression that a youth might be facing, whether initial experimenting, or substance abuse, or substance dependence. The experience can only be positive, particularly if the youth takes advantage of the opportunity to sincerely evaluate him/herself thoroughly.

Urinalysis is only a part of a complete diagnostic assessment. By themselves, UA's are grossly insufficient in determining the nature of the present or potential substance abuse problem for the youth, without other behavioral information. In some instances results may be inaccurate, or can be adulterated by a defensive-minded youth. Furthermore, some general physicians lack the specialized training to recognize some of the technological data, or may not request the appropriate type of screen for the situation. For these reasons we recommend that the urinalysis portion of the diagnostic assessment should be provided by the assessing agency.

The essential elements of a substance abuse diagnostic assessment are:

*Urinalysis (Dip-sticks and home tests are not considered valid for this purpose)
*A thorough drug-use history including frequency, amount and method of use along with most recent use.
* Specific indicators of consequences of substance abuse as related to school, social relations, family, physical health, psychological health, and legal areas.
* Family background and history of substance abuse in the family.
* Attempts to control, cut-down or quit the use of substance(s).
* The youth's assessment of themselves.
* A specific diagnosis and recommendation from the counselor.

These elements are achieved through a combination of written and verbally elicited information from the youth as well as any corroborating sources available, including the urinalysis. Counselors are trained to look for various forms of defensiveness; such as lying, minimizing, justifying, etc. Assessments are by no means infallible, and do depend on some cooperation of the youth. However, even a very resistant youth is then faced with the exercise of such defenses, which can erode them. Diagnostic assessment can be a powerful event that influences a youth to change.

As with all substance abuse counseling, youth ages 13 and over have a legal right to the **confidentiality** of their assessment, so specific written "releases of confidential information" need to be sought to include parents or other parties. We request a basic release of assessment completion to the Administrator in order to comply with the suspension terms, and recommend a release to the Intervention Specialist for the purpose of support services for the youth and the family.