
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591 April, 2020

Challenging Times

During this challenging time, everyone at SAS joins me in sending good wishes to you and your loved ones and we hope you are safe and well.

We hope that as parents or caregivers, you are able to do your best to take care of yourself so you can take care of your family. Our powertotheparent.org website has excellent resources and advice on parenting and talking to your children. Some of the recommendations may be helpful to facilitate meaningful conversations about everything that we are all going through. Additional resources are included in this newsletter.

It is helpful to be honest, reassuring, comforting and understanding when you talk with your children. Listen to what they say and reflect back what they have shared in a caring and empathetic manner. If your child knows they have someone who they can share their thoughts and fears with in a meaningful way, it can help reduce their stress, anger, frustration, and sadness.

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April is Alcohol Awareness Month & Covid-19

Alcohol Awareness Month is a public health initiative originally organized by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence as a way of increasing awareness regarding the dangers of alcoholism and issues related to alcohol use. The program was started in April 1987 with the intention of targeting college-aged students who might be drinking too much as part of their newfound freedom. It has since become a national movement to draw more attention to the causes and effects of Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) as well as how to help families and communities prevent and respond to drinking problems.

With the stress associated with the Covid-19 crises and the need for social distancing, there are reports of increased alcohol sales and people using alcohol to manage their emotions. This is a cause for concern.

- Alcohol compromises the immune system. (Cassel, 2020). Dr. George Koob, the Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism says that one bout of excessive drinking can have measurable negative effects on the immune system responses (Szabo & Saha, 2015).
- Excessive alcohol use has a detrimental impact on the functioning of lungs and can make acute respiratory distress syndrome and other pulmonary conditions worse (Moazed & Calfee, 2014).
- Alcohol use is a contributor to domestic violence against spouses (Leonard & Quigly, 2017) and children (Freisthler & Holmes 2012).
- Households are already experiencing stress during the social distancing and stay-at-home orders and the use of alcohol can exacerbate this stress and make it worse (Lang, 2020).
- Job loss increases stress and contributes to individuals turning to alcohol to ease that pain.
- Excessive alcohol use impairs judgement when it is critical that individuals make sound decisions (Azar & Springer, 2010).
- During this period of social distancing, it is important for parents to monitor their children in terms of alcohol and other drug use. Teens are also experiencing stress, boredom, and other uncomfortable feelings. Many teens are dealing with great losses as they lose loved ones, household comforts and routines, and their own employment, academic, athletic, and social opportunities such as the possible cancellation of iconic celebrations like graduations and proms that they have looked forward to

for many years.

- The earlier teens begin drinking, the more likely they are to develop an alcohol use disorder (NIAAA).
- Teens who have used alcohol and other drugs in the past to “medicate” their feelings may now be looking for creative ways to access these substances in and out of the home. Teens can be very resourceful in locating places to get alcohol and other drugs even during this crisis. They may meet up with friends or even a new dealer to access alcohol and other drugs in new and possibly more dangerous ways.
- For some parents, a craving by their teen for alcohol or other drugs may be the first indication for parents have that their teen may be addicted to alcohol, marijuana or other drugs. If this is the situation or you need more information, you can contact .
 - ⇒ NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports at 1-877-8-HOPE NYC 1-877-846-7369) 24 hrs. a day, 7 days a week
 - ⇒ The Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health Information, Support, and Referral Line at 914-995-1900, 8 AM – 8 PM
 - ⇒ The Mid Hudson Regional Addiction Resource Center at www.fordrughelp.com

Smokers and Vapers May Be At Greater Risk for Covid-19

An April 13, 2020 article in the New York Times discussed the risks of smoking and vaping as it relates to Covid-19. The coronavirus attacks the lungs and smoking and vaping can exacerbate the risks associated with this disease, the risk of getting the virus and the risk of spreading the disease.

Dr. Jonathan Winickoff, the director of pediatric research at the Tobacco and Treatment Center at Massachusetts General Hospital is quoted in the article as saying that “quitting during this pandemic could not only save your life but by preventing the need for your treatment in a hospital, you might also save someone else’s life.” Dr Winickoff was joined by the Massachusetts attorney general, Maura Healy and they issued the following advisory: “You bring a vaping device or a cigarette to your mouth and do so repeatedly. You touch the cartridge. You put it next to your face. You are spreading whatever is in your hand into your body. At the same time, many of my patients who smoke or vape have increased coughing and expectorating. And that’s a recipe for increased spread.”

There are studies that already show that cigarette smoking weakens the immune system and compromises lung function. Unfortunately, since vaping is relatively new, research is limited but early studies suggest that e-cigarettes may cause inflammation in the airways and lungs. It was also found that flavored tobacco products and products containing THC which are popular among teens can exacerbate lung infections. These factors make smokers and vapers more susceptible to the coronavirus infection and once infected these patients may have a harder time resisting the virus. Although there is no research on this yet, there is speculation among the medical community

that the high numbers of young people who have contracted Covid-19 may be connected to their vaping and their use of marijuana.

Currently, five million middle and high school students report having vaped nicotine and marijuana products. An outbreak of lung illnesses last summer was traced to vaping marijuana oils that contained the additive vitamin E acetate. Dr. Winickoff said “Inhaling combusted or vaped cannabis products can damage lung cells, may increase viral replication, and does affect the ability to fight off infection. Clean air is what the lungs should be inhaling during a global pandemic.”

Dr. Alicia Casey who directs the pulmonary vaping program at the Boston Children’s Hospital, says that it is challenging to get teenagers to quit vaping because vaping paraphernalia is “everywhere” in a teen’s world, including school and at social gatherings. Dr. Casey had hoped that social distancing would help teens quit. However, she says “But I often see that they’re more anxious now, and they’re vaping more frequently.” She advises, “If parents notice that happening, they should speak with their kids about the risks of Covid-19 and other pulmonary complications to vapers.” Dr. Casey went on to say that she had several teenagers over the winter who had more trouble with the influenza than they should have. “Since Covid-19 can be similar to a severe influenza, I worry about those underlying lung issues from vaping.”

April 20

420, 4:20, or 4/20 (pronounced four-twenty) is slang in the cannabis culture for the consumption of marijuana, especially smoking marijuana around the time 4:20 PM. It also refers to cannabis-oriented celebrations that take place annually on April 20. It is also a day for some dedicated to promoting the use of marijuana

For parents, raising drug-free children in an era of medical marijuana and debates over the legalization of marijuana, the overt marketing of marijuana to young people is one of the biggest challenges of parenting today. Never has it been more important for parents to keep their children from vaping and using marijuana. “Normalizing” marijuana use to young people poses real health risks including compromising their developing brain. Parents can play a very important role in educating their teens about the dangers associated with marijuana use and making it clear that teen use is unhealthy and not acceptable behavior. Encouraging teens to be critical thinkers about the money-making goals of companies marketing marijuana use to young people is a very effective educational tool because most teens do not like the idea of being “fooled” or “used.”

Challenge teens to think about why does the promotion of 4/20 take place on sites and apps like Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube that are popular with tweens and teens. What companies promote the use of marijuana on 4/20? Ask your teen to identify tricks marketers use to disguise what are really promotional ads. Also it is interesting for students to learn about the role that “Wall Street” plays in promoting the use of marijuana and to learn information about who is investing in companies that produce, market, and distribute marijuana.

Co-Occurring Disorders

People who have both a substance use disorder (SUD) and mental health disorder are diagnosed as having co-occurring disorders, or dual disorders. This is also sometimes called a dual diagnosis.

Substance use disorders (SUD) can be mild, moderate, or severe and can be characterized by as few as two to three of the symptoms on the list below.

- Taking the substance in larger amounts or for longer than you're meant to.
- Wanting to cut down or stop using the substance but not managing to.
- Spending a lot of time getting, using, or recovering from use of the substance.
- Cravings and urges to use the substance.
- Not managing to do what you should at work, home, or school because of substance use.
- Continuing to use, even when it causes problems in relationships.
- Giving up important social, occupational, or recreational activities because of substance use.
- Using substances again and again, even when it puts you in danger.
- Continuing to use, even when you know you have a physical or psychological problem that could have been caused or made worse by the substance.
- Needing more of the substance to get the effect you want (tolerance).
- Development of withdrawal symptoms, which can be relieved by taking more of the substance.

Mental health disorders

Some of the most common mental health disorders found in people with SUD include mood and anxiety disorders. In fact, the National Comorbidity Survey found in 1997 that alcoholics were two to three times more likely than non-alcoholics to also have an anxiety disorder. NIAAA's National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey, found that those with a history of alcohol dependence, had a more than a four-fold-increased risk for a major depressive episode than those without a history of alcohol dependence.

An even higher percentage of people with severe mental illness also have co-occurring substance use disorders. Called severe because of the severity and length of episodes of illness, these mental health disor-

ders include schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorders. (NIAAA, 2020).

It isn't always clear which comes first, alcohol use disorder or a mental health disorder, and how each affects the other. But it is known that these disorders can often occur together and should be treated together. At this stressful time when many people are turning to alcohol to deal with their fears, anxieties, loneliness, and sadness, it is important to know that alcohol use can exacerbate mental health disorders and it is important to get help to prevent or reduce the severity of a co-occurring disorder.

Coronavirus resources for information and and help

- The Westchester County Department of Community **Mental Health** (DCMH) recognizes that this can be a stressful time for many people. If you are experiencing anxiety or stress that has begun to affect your daily life and you feel you need support, call DCMH at (914) 995-1900 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. To send a text message, use #914-461-7281. DCMH can provide supportive counseling and refer you to longer term services if you need it. [Additional DCMH information and updates.](#)
- New Yorkers can also call the COVID 19 Emotional Support Hotline at 1-844-863-9314 for mental health counseling.

The thought of having had family members exposed, or being exposed to a virus yourself can create feelings of uncertainty, fear or anxiety. If you have specific health-related questions there are people you can contact.

- People under self-quarantine, or exposure to a known case, can call the Westchester County **Health** Department at (866) 588-0195. Updates are available from the County and can be accessed by clicking on [Health Department on COVID-19.](#)
- Westchester County residents who want COVID-19 Information can also call 211, where contact specialists can provide assistance.
- The NYS Department of Health COVID-19 Hotline is (888) 364-3065.

If your family can benefit from **food** resources the following websites can be helpful:

<https://info.feedingwestchester.org/drive-thru-food-distribution>

<https://feedingwestchester.org/find-help/mobile-food-pantry-schedule/>

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