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# Parenting for Prevention

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Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, November, 2014

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## **The Present of Your Presence**

Every time of year has its own challenges in terms of teens using alcohol and other drugs. We worry about the summer when many, teens first experiment with drugs, we worry about transition times and we worry about special occasions like Homecoming, Halloween, the **night before Thanksgiving** when many college students return, and New Year's Eve.

The holiday season is a time with its own special issues. For many families there is an expectation that everything will be perfect and everyone will be happy. Unfortunately, that is not always possible and it is better to have lowered expectations and keep the focus on what the holidays are really about.

The holidays are really about family and friends gathering together and spending quality time with one another. The greatest "present" that one can give to another is to be fully "present" and engaged with them. That is more important than any gift you can purchase in a store.

Patricia Murphy Warble,  
LMSW, CPP

## **Challenges Of The Holidays**

There are many challenges during the holiday season. The holidays can be very emotional, they can create stressful situations where families get overwhelmed, work too hard to have a nice celebration, spend too much money, are unavailable because of long hours at work, or have unrealistic expectations about the holidays.

### **Home Alone**

The holidays are a very busy time for everyone and it can be difficult to get all the holiday chores accomplished, work, and also supervise children and teens on school vacation. As a result, many students are in unchaperoned places and are not being watched by a responsible adult. Make sure that your teens are in a safe environment. When teens are "home alone" they are more likely to experiment with alcohol and other drugs, and engage in other risky behaviors.

### **Alcohol Availability**

Another challenge is that it is not unusual for adults and teens to be attending the same functions and alcohol is often available at most of these parties. Alcohol may be put out on a table where there is no supervision in regard to people helping themselves to drinks, there might be someone serving drinks who is not monitoring a young person who asks for a drink, and, at a crowded party-setting it can be difficult for parents to keep track of their children.

### **Marijuana and Prescription Drugs**

There is heightened concern about the use of these drugs by teenagers in our area. Among young people there is growing perception that marijuana is a safe drug as a result of the recent of public discussions over medical marijuana and efforts to legalize the drug for adult recreational use in some states. Colorado and Washington state recently legalized the recreational use of marijuana.

With marijuana being available for certain medical conditions in 2015 in New York it is likely there will be a decreased perception of risk among Westchester teens. The 2013 MTF survey indicates that just 39.5 percent of high school seniors view regular marijuana use as harmful. That's down from 2012's rate of 44.1 percent, and considerably lower than rates from the past two decades.

According to a September, 2014 posting on the Community AntiDrug Coalitions of America website, based on a study published in the Journal of Adolescent Medicine and reported by the Center for Advancing

Health, the misuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs by teens is increasing all over the world. The study also found that teens did not have enough knowledge about the correct use of medications, despite rating their own knowledge as competent.

In the U.S. 22% of teens over-medicated with painkillers and 14% did not tell their parents about their use. Prevalence of self-medication was higher among females in most countries. Approximately 14% - 28% of youth gave away, loaned or sold their prescription drugs, especially painkillers, stimulants and sleep medication.

In addition, in our county there has been concern about the growing use and connection between prescription drugs and heroin. There have been several cases in Westchester County where teens who became addicted to prescription drugs and then could no longer obtain those drugs, turned to heroin which was available and affordable. A narcotic pill may cost \$80 on the street whereas a bag of heroin may only be \$6.00.

### Role Modeling

During the holidays it can be upsetting for young people to see adults consuming a significant amount of alcohol or misusing prescription drugs as part of holiday celebrations, or driving under the influence. When parents drive under the influence of these substances, teens may think that it is okay for them to do so. To offset the impact of this reality, parents can be pro-active in terms of keeping their teens safe and healthy during the holiday period.

First and foremost, try to be a good role model for your teens and if you are not, admit that you have made some unhealthy choices but want your children to be healthier than you.

Also talk about the ways in which the holidays can be a difficult time for some people and that they may look to alcohol and/or other substances to help them socialize, or as a way to stay awake, sleep, or deal with stress, unhappiness or depression. A holiday celebration that includes **an intoxicated relative or guest provides a teachable moment**. After the event discuss addiction, family history, genetic vulnerability, and the importance of the delaying first use. Remember the older the teen is at first use, the less likely they are to develop a problem. Even delaying the first use of alcohol from 15-17 can reduce their risk for addiction by half! Brainstorm with children better and healthier ways to deal with these issues and point out that alcohol, marijuana and other drugs can actually aggravate these conditions.

**Remember, what you permit, you promote.** Set clear and consistent “no use” messages about alcohol, drugs, and other substances. In particular, let your children know that just because it is the holiday time and many of the adults around them are drinking, it is your expectation that they will not drink.

It is also important for young people to realize that small amounts of alcohol or other drugs can impair a young person and cause them to fall or have other accidents that could result in serious

consequences. Young people often don't realize that taking just one pill could seriously impact their health.

In addition to these suggestions, there are additional things that parents can do to keep adolescents safe during the holiday period.

- **Consider signing a “Contract for Life”** with your teen. This contract is between a parent and teen and states that parents agree to pick up a teen who needs a safe ride home or provide cab fare with no questions asked. The goal is to keep teens safe for the moment and other concerns can be dealt with at a later date. The contract is available on the Internet at [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org).
- **Clean out medicine cabinets** so that prescription and non-prescription drugs are not available to guests using your bathrooms.
- **Teens who babysit** are often forced with the dilemma of riding home with an intoxicated employer or telling that employer that they will have someone pick them up or are meeting people nearby. All parents need to discuss with teens who babysit options for getting home safely. Parents should let their teen know where they are during the evening when their child is babysitting and let them know that that you are available to come and pick them up. Make sure your child understands, that no matter how embarrassing the situation, under no circumstances should they get into a car with someone who has been drinking.



**Family all together.**

**Food on the table.**

**Welcome to one of the  
more dangerous seasons  
of the year for teens.**

It's Thanksgiving time. A time to celebrate, and a time to have the conversation with your teen about staying safe this season and all year round. With college students home for the holidays, peer pressure to drink and use drugs can be stronger than ever. Power to the Parent empowers Westchester parents. Learn the facts, strategies and information to help your teens. [PowerToTheParent.org](http://PowerToTheParent.org).



PowerToTheParent.org is a program of the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth. Funding was made possible (in part) by Grant Number 5U79SP01556 from Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and through a Drug Free Community grant from SAMHSA. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. For more information call 914-332-1300 or email: [Let'sDoThis@PowerToTheParent.org](mailto:Let'sDoThis@PowerToTheParent.org)

***When The Holidays Aren't So Happy Conference***

***Clinical Strategies for Assessing and Intervening With Depressed & Substance Abusing Youth***

***December 3, 2014***

***8:00am – 3:15pm***

***Abigail Kirsch at Tappan Hill, Tarrytown, NY***

**8:30 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

**8:45 AM DEPRESSION AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE: CLINICAL CONNECTIONS**

**Marianne Chai, MD**, NYU School of Medicine; Medical Director, The Center for Living; & former fellow NYU Child Study Center & NYU Medical Center Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse

**10:15 AM ADOLESCENT MEDICAL CONDITIONS THAT CAUSE DEPRESSION**

**Sofya Maslyanskaya, MD**, Division of Adolescent Medicine, The Children's Hospital at Montefiore & The Pediatric Hospital for Albert Einstein College of Medicine

**11:15 AM SUBSTANCE INDUCED DEPRESSION**

**Steven Kipnis, MD**, Board Certified in Addiction medicine & Internal Medicine; former Medical Director of the NY State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services

**1:00 PM TREATMENT FOR CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS**

**Robert White, DNP, RN, APN, BC**, Rutgers School of Nursing, and Supervising Nurse Practitioner, Sunrise Detox in NJ.

**2:00 – 3:15 PM WORKSHOPS (pick 1 or 2)**

**BULLYING, DEPRESSION, & SUBSTANCE ABUSE: CLINICAL CONNECTIONS**

**Andrea Fallick, LCSW, CASAC, CPP**, Assistant Director & Certified Olweus Bullying Prevention Trainer, Student Assistance Services

**FAMILY TREATMENT STRATEGIES FOR DEPRESSED & SUBSTANCE ABUSING YOUTH**

**Jennifer Powell-Lunder, PsyD.**, Senior Clinical Program Liaison, Four Winds Hospital

**Call 914-332-3200 for more information**

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