
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, October, 2015

Changes Are Coming

This is my favorite time of year and the fall has never been as warm.

As the leaves change there is concern among substance abuse professionals that there is another change coming to our state which could impact our children in a negative way. On January 1st marijuana will be available for certain medical conditions in NY State and plans are being made to dispense it in two Westchester locations.

This is a concern as many young people erroneously think that since marijuana is being legally dispensed it means that marijuana is not so bad.

This attitude reflects what is referred to as a decreased perception of harm which is a precursor to increased use. So, the expectation is that there will be more students using marijuana as they erroneously perceive that it is a safe substance, after all, it is “medicine” for some.

This is dangerous thinking as our young people are becoming addicted to this drug because it has a higher THC level than in the past.

*Patricia Murphy Warble,
LMSW, CPP*

Be Informed to Talk To Youth About Marijuana

On January 1 marijuana will be available in New York State for some health conditions. Media coverage of locations of manufacturing facilities and dispensaries are already triggering confusion among adults and youth. As a result, there will be several informational presentations and materials available to help parents and others who interact with youth clarify some of the issues about marijuana.

Parents and professionals need to be informed so they have the words to respond to teens’ questions and misperceptions and make it clear that marijuana use is unhealthy for teens. This is very important because as reported in the 2014 Monitoring the Future Study, even though the use of marijuana declined in 2014, perception of risk also declined. Almost 40 years of research has shown that decreased perception of harm precedes increased use of a drug. Therefore it is concerning that in 2014 the percentages of youth who believe regular marijuana use results in “great harm” physically or in other ways continued its long-term decline by 2.1 percentage points to 58.9% for 8th graders, 1.1 percentage points to 45.4% for 10th graders, and 3.4 percentage points to 36.1% for 12th graders. **Now more than ever parents need to counteract this misperception and re-enforce that marijuana is not healthy for adolescents.**

The decline in the perception of risk may be the result of the efforts to legalize marijuana or approve medical marijuana for recreational or medical use. In addition, many parents are not aware that the marijuana that is available today is not the same drug that was available when parents were in high school and college. Today’s marijuana has a much higher percentage of THC (the active ingredient that causes the psychoactive effect) and is more likely to be contaminated with pesticides, bacteria, fungi, butane, and other harmful ingredients (LaFrate, 2015).

Negative Effects For Teens

The increased THC content has increased the likelihood that teens will become addicted meaning that tolerance will develop and anxiety, irritability, reduced appetite, difficulty sleeping, and craving (the signs of marijuana withdrawal) will develop after two weeks of when marijuana use is stopped. Teens in treatment for marijuana use reported an average of

4.5 to 6.0 withdrawal symptoms after two weeks of total abstinence from marijuana (Budney, 2011). However, parents should know that teens who use at least three times a week don't experience withdrawal on days that they don't use because the marijuana stays in their system and their brain is still under the influence.

The differences in nervous system development is one fact in explaining why 1 in 12 adults who try marijuana become addicted but 1 in 6 adolescents become addicted (NIDA, 2011). Developmental differences are also the reason why adolescents who drink alcohol before 15 are much more likely to become alcoholic than if they begin drinking at 21 (Grant & Dawson, 1998).

In addition to marijuana addiction, even teens who are not addicted often make harmful decisions after using the drug. Teens report anecdotally to counselors and other professionals that they are using marijuana and driving, engaging in unprotected sexual activities, losing interest in school and community activities, and not doing as well academically.

Considerations for Parents

Parents who tried or experimented with marijuana when they were young may not view their teen's use as harmful. The difference in THC content between the marijuana of the 80's and 90's and the marijuana available in 2015 is like the difference in alcohol content between 12 oz of beer and 12 oz of hard liquor. The THC content of today's marijuana can be greater than 30%, whereas three decades ago the THC content was

under 10% (LaFrate, 2015). In other words, erroneously thinking that it is OK for a teen to use marijuana would be like erroneously thinking "I drank beer in high school and it's not unhealthy for my son to drink beer;" without realizing that the same erroneous view of today's marijuana would be like thinking "I drank beer in high school so it's not unhealthy for my son to drink scotch!!"

A recent study that looked at the effect of "medical marijuana" advertisements on students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades found that the students who had greater exposure to "medical marijuana" had stronger intentions to use marijuana one year later (D'Amico et al 2015). This study is another reason why parents of all children need to be prepared for their children's reactions to the change in the New York law.

To learn more, get involved with your local community substance abuse prevention coalition, go to trusted sources for information such as the American Medical Association or the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), and attend special events in your school and community where accurate and current information will be presented.

Upcoming Events

Parents, professionals and the general public are invited to hear Kevin Sabet, Ph.D. at two free presentations. They will be at John Jay High School in **Cross River** on October 28,

and Fox Lane High School in **Bedford on October 29th**. Both events begin at 7:30pm and end at 9:00pm.

Dr. Sabet has studied, researched, written about, and implemented drug policy for almost 20 years. He has worked in the Clinton and Bush Administrations, and in 2011 he stepped down after serving more than two years as the senior advisor to President Obama's drug control director, having been the only drug policy staffer to have ever served as a political appointee in a Democrat and Republican administration.

Currently Dr. Sabet is the Director of the Drug Policy Institute at the University of Florida and an Assistant Professor in the College of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry. With Patrick J. Kennedy, he is the co-founder of Project SAM (Smart Approaches to Marijuana).

Synthetic Cannabinoids (K2)

Several alerts have been issued in the past few weeks about the rising concern in our area about the use of synthetic cannabinoids (K2). The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reports that emergency department visits as a result of using this substance have continued to increase and there is mounting evidence of these products' widespread availability in New York City and in surrounding areas, and throughout NY State.

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Synthetic Cannabinoids (K2)

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Synthetic cannabinoids are referred to by different names including: K2, Spice, synthetic marijuana, “legal” marijuana, or Herbal Incense.

These drugs have nothing in common with marijuana, except that they are usually smoked and consist of chemicals on ground up dried leaves giving an appearance similar to marijuana. According to the NY State OASAS, the name “synthetic marijuana” is misleading and may lead users to believe that the drug is far less harmful than it really is. The substances are marketed as an inexpensive way to get a marijuana like high or legal alternative to marijuana. They often are sold in packages with bright colors and designs that are attractive to youth. The packets are usually marked as home incense, or herbal smoking blends. Some packets are labeled as “not for human consumption”, others claim that the contents are safe, natural, and not easily detected in drug tests.

Once this drug is used the type and severity of symptoms are variable, and can be extremely dangerous. Two common clinical patterns occur. The most common presentation of a person who uses synthetics is to appear sluggish and have some symptoms similar to an opioid overdose including lethargy, confusion, respiratory depression, bradycardia, vomiting, seizure, elevated heart rate, loss of consciousness, or unresponsiveness. However, other users may appear to be highly agitated and have symptoms similar to those of phencyclidine (PCP) use including hallucinations, aggressive behavior, suicidal thoughts, or paranoia. If someone is experiencing

any of these symptoms it is important to call 911.

The use of this drug is of great concern for many reasons. Currently there is no antidote available for synthetic drug intoxication. In addition, synthetic drugs cannot be detected by standard urine toxicology screens; therefore, synthetic drug exposure should not be ruled out based on negative screening results. Because the exact compounds contained in synthetic drug products change frequently, risks and adverse consequences are unpredictable. Also, scientific evidence for treatment of individuals with chronic use is lacking, but motivational counseling and cognitive behavioral therapy might be effective.

It is illegal in New York State to

possess, sell, offer to sell, or manufacture synthetic drugs. Stores in possession of these drugs can be fined \$250 per packet. Additionally, continuing or repeat violation may result in closure of the retail establishment and entities and persons who have been ordered to stop selling synthetic drugs risk additional civil and criminal penalties if found to have them.

However, synthetic drugs are still found to be sold in small stores, gas stations, and bodegas. Often, one small molecule is changed in the substance and this enables some of these establishments to get around the law and evade criminal prosecution for selling this substance. Anonymous reports of the sale of these drugs can be made to the NYS Governors Synthetics Hotline 1-888-99-SALTS.

Vampires, witches, zombies, goblins, peer pressure, drugs, and alcohol.

Some Halloween dangers are much more real than others.

Halloween is one of the biggest nights for teen drinking and drug use. Combined with unsupervised parties and careless drivers, Halloween can be a frightful night for families. Power to the Parent is here to empower Westchester parents. Learn the facts, strategies and information to help you get through to your teens. Teach your teen how not to get tricked this Halloween. PowerToTheParent.org.

POWER TO THE PARENT .ORG

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When she was a child, you protected her from reaching for a dangerous pot.

Your teen still needs your attention.

She was a young, innocent child, and in the blink of an eye, she's a teen. Your teen still needs your guidance, especially when it comes to not using marijuana. Take the time to talk to your teens and preteens. Here's why it's worth it:

- 1) Teenagers are more vulnerable to addiction.
- 2) Kids who start using marijuana regularly decrease their IQ and impair learning.
- 3) Marijuana use while driving makes for a crash twice as likely to happen.
- 4) Today's marijuana is more potent than it was in the 60s and 70s.
- 5) Parents who talk with their kids about not using drugs have teens who are less likely to use drugs.

Bottom line: the longer a young person remains drug-free, the fewer negative consequences.

Westchester parents, get facts, resources and tips from PowerToTheParent.org



Up Coming Events

October 28 7:30 to 9pm
John Jay High School
Reefer Sanity: Seven Great Myths About Marijuana
Kevin Sabet, PhD

October 29 7:30 to 9pm
Fox Lane High School
Reefer Sanity: Seven Great Myths About Marijuana
Kevin Sabet, PhD

October 28 7:30 to 9pm
Ardsley High School
What you need to know about Opioid medication & Heroin
Ross Fishman, PhD

There is no registration required or charge to attend the above presentations.

Dec 10 8am to 3pm
Westchester Marriott,
Tarrytown, NY

When The Holidays Aren't So Happy 22nd Annual Conference

When It's Not JUST Substance Abuse: Clinical Strategies for Addressing "Other" Risk Factors for Adolescents