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# Parenting for Prevention

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

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## Why Take a Chance?

Leaving aside the debate over the legalization of marijuana, the efficacy of marijuana to deal with pain, and all issues related to civil liberties and the rights of individuals, there is ONE salient, compelling fact that trumps all of these considerations in terms of the safety and health of the young people of our nation.

That fact is that the younger a person begins to use alcohol, marijuana, tobacco or other drugs, the more likely they are to become addicted and the more likely they are to suffer the dire consequences sometime during their life associated with addiction.

Why would parents not do everything they could to protect their children from the possibility of becoming addicted? Research shows that there is a 24% reduction in drug use by teens who have parents who talk to them about issues related to drug and alcohol use. Lets get this school year off to a positive start, let's start talking!!

Patiricia M. Warble, MSW, CPP



## Update on Marijuana

In June, the New England Journal of Medicine published the latest research done by scientists at the National Institute on Drug Abuse entitled *The Adverse Health Effects of Marijuana Use*. The scientists involved in the project were Nora D. Volkow, M.D., Ruben D. Baler, Ph.D., Wilson M. Compton, M.D., and Susan R.B. Weiss, Ph.D.

According to Monitoring The Future (MTF) survey that is done each year by the University of Minnesota, marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States, with about 12 percent of individuals aged 12 and over reporting use in the past year. Rates of use are particularly high and are increasing among teenagers, which is the result of their diminishing perception of the drug's risks.

The growing perception of marijuana as a safe drug may reflect recent public discussions over medical marijuana and movements to legalize the drug for adult recreational use in some states. Colorado and Washington state recently legalized the recreational use of marijuana and 20 other states plus the District of Columbia now allow marijuana use for medical reasons.

With medical marijuana now signed into law in New York it is likely there will be a decreased perception of risk among our 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. However, the latest research tells a much different story.

**“The marijuana today is a very different creature that it was in the 1960s, when John Lennon called it a ‘harmless’ giggle.” —Herbert Kleber**

The article in the New England Journal of Medicine makes the following observation:

“We must be careful drawing conclusions from past research on marijuana’s effects for several reasons. First, alcohol and tobacco are linked to more morbidity and mortality in our society than other drugs in part due to their widespread availability as legal substances. It is likely that, were patterns of marijuana use by people of all ages to become comparable to that of these other legal substances, statistics regarding marijuana’s impact on automobile accidents (i.e., compared to alcohol), lung diseases (i.e., compared to tobacco), or treatment needs for those addicted (compared to both alcohol and tobacco) would look much different than they do currently.

Another reason we must be careful drawing conclusions from past research on marijuana’s effects is the dramatic increase in concentrations of the marijuana plant’s main psychoactive ingredient, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) seen over the past couple decades, along with the new ways of administering high THC content (e.g., electronic cigarette devices). The potency of an average marijuana cigarette has steadily increased from roughly 3 percent THC in the early 1990s to 12.5 percent THC in 2013.

During this same period, the potency of marijuana extracts (also known as “hash oil”) has also climbed to what are now staggering levels: The average marijuana extract contains over 50 percent THC, with some samples containing more than 80 percent THC. This means some historical findings about health and developmental effects from marijuana use may not be relevant when trying to predict effects on contemporary users.

Herbert Kleber, MD from Columbia University and drug czar under George H.W. Bush says, “the marijuana today is a very different creature that in was n in the 1960s, when John Lennon called it a ‘harmless’ giggle.”

A rapid rise in emergency room (ER) admissions linked to marijuana use attests to the greater dangers of acute use than have been seen in the past. There were 128,857 ER visits related to marijuana use in 2011, nearly double the number from 2004 (65,699).

### School Performance

Marijuana can impair critical cognitive functions including learning, memory and problem solving and that impairment can last for days. As a result marijuana can compromise the ability of a teen to function in a school setting which in turn will impact a student’s academic success. The 6.5 percent of 12th graders reporting daily or near daily marijuana use in the MTF survey likely underestimates the prevalence of regular

use among all 17-18-year-olds, as regular marijuana users are more likely to drop out of school and as a result will not be included in the survey.

In addition, a highly-publicized study finding that marijuana use is linked to a severe drop in IQ has been successfully defended by the scientific community overseas and in the United

States, including the National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Dr. Nora Volkow.

Dr Volkow’s remarks are posted on the CAD-CA website state, “The message inherent in these and in multiple supporting studies is clear. Regular marijuana use in adolescence is



known to be part of a cluster of behaviors that can produce enduring detrimental effects and alter the trajectory of a young person’s life—thwarting his or her potential. Beyond potentially lowering IQ, teen marijuana use is linked to school dropout, other drug use, mental health problems, etc. Given the current number of regular marijuana users (about 1 in 15 high school seniors) and the possibility of this number increasing with marijuana legalization, we cannot afford to divert our focus from the central point: regular marijuana use stands to jeopardize a young person’s chances of success in school and in life,” Dr, Volkow concluded.

### **Addiction**

The researchers state emphatically, that frequent marijuana use can and often does lead to addiction. Marijuana's ability to cause addiction in some individuals is consistent with its ability to trigger withdrawal symptoms, including craving, irritability, anxiety, sleeping difficulties, and feeling generally ill or depressed, symptoms that make it hard to quit the drug and cause some people to relapse after they have tried to quit.

Approximately, nine percent of people who experiment with marijuana become addicted to it. That number goes up to one in six among those who start using marijuana as teenagers and there is a 25 to 50 percent addiction rate among those teens that use marijuana every day.

Teenagers who use marijuana regularly are two to four times more likely to experience addiction symptoms within two years after they first use the drug. And marijuana addiction can be an indicator for increased risk of using other illicit drugs in the future.

### **Lung Diseases**

There is always a concern about a substance that is ingested into the lungs. Regular marijuana users report more symptoms of chronic bronchitis than non-smokers. Smoking marijuana can also impact the immune system and as a result can increase the likelihood of developing other respiratory infections, including pneumonia.

### **Driving**

According to the National Institute on Drug Addiction website, "Marijuana compromises judgment and affects many other skills required for safe driving: alertness, concentration, coordination, and reaction time. Marijuana use makes it difficult to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road. Marijuana is the most commonly identified illegal drug in fatal accidents (showing up in the bloodstream of about 14 percent of drivers), sometimes in combination with alcohol or other drugs. By itself, marijuana is believed to roughly double a driver's chances of being in an accident, and the combination of marijuana and even small amounts of alcohol is even more dangerous, more so than either substance by itself."

The article published in the New England School of Medicine can be read in its entirety at



## **Stoned, Smashed, Drunk, Buzzed, High, or Under-The Influence**

However, one wants to describe it, the use of any substance that changes the mood or feeling of an individual carries with it inherent risks and dangers. This is especially true of when considering teenagers. New imaging techniques have documented the vulnerability of a young brain. The research shows the critical importance of delaying the use of substances by teenagers.

Teens that start drinking before the age of 15 are 5 times more likely to become addicted to alcohol later on, unlike those kids who waited until after they were 21.

According to National Institute on Drug Addiction, 1 in 6 individuals who begin using marijuana as an adolescent become addicted. John Marini of Columbia describes marijuana addiction by saying, marijuana problems tend to be less dramatic when compared to alcohol, heroin, cocaine or meth. However, when addicted to marijuana you're not as ambitious, you perform less well. You probably stay home, watch TV and eat ice cream. This disorder is about the absence of things—what doesn't happen. Herber Kleber, MD from Columbia University says "the marijuana today is a very different creature that what it was in the 1960s, when John Lennon called it a 'harmless' giggle. The marijuana used today is a very powerful, potent drug.

If a teen uses alcohol, marijuana and other drugs during their early adolescence, they are more likely to experience the consequences of addiction at some point during their life. Those consequences can be devastating and can include negative health issues, difficult relationships, alienation from family members, being homeless, limitations on their achievements, negative monetary issues and the loss of jobs.

Given this likelihood, why would any parent or caregiver want to risk the possibility of their child suffering these lifelong consequences? Think about anyone you know who has struggled with addiction, think about people in the news whose personal struggles with addiction have ended in serious or even fatal results.

And sadly, the tragedy of addiction, does not only affect the addicted person, it impacts everyone that loves or interacts with that person. It brings heartbreak, worry and can tear families apart and create lifelong alienations.

However, research shows that if parents talk to their children about issues related to the use of alcohol, marijuana and other drugs, their teens are less likely to get involved with these substances.. As teenagers get older, they may become more curious about alcohol and other drugs. They may turn to their parents for answers and advice. Even if your teen doesn't come to you, you should be the one to start the conversation.

Since some questions may be difficult to answer, be prepared. Arm yourself with information and defenses against underage drinking and substance abuse. Use this opportunity to start an open, honest conversation. Go to [powertotheparent.org](http://powertotheparent.org) for additional suggestions.

## Up Coming Events

### **November 11**

9am to 2

Youth Leadership Conference,  
High School Students  
Westchester County Center

Contact: Patty Warble,  
(914) 332-1300

### **November 13**

6 to 9pm

Bedford Central Family U

*Conversations and Connections*,  
Ty Sells