Parentally Speaking

A monthly publication for caregivers in Middlesex County

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Providing Substance Abuse Prevention, Education, and Support for Personal Recovery

What's Your Parenting Style?

No one has all the answers when it comes to raising safe and healthy teens who are prepared to succeed in the world. What we do know is that research shows that certain approaches to parenting can often make a difference. And not just parents, but grandparents and other non-traditional caregivers also can benefit from better understanding, communicating and connecting with the teen in their lives.

What we do know is that using a balanced parenting style is best. And what is balanced parenting style? Well, it is one where as a parent you:

- Nurture, discipline and respect your child.
- Set standards and clear, reasonable limits.
- Keep track of your teen's behavior and whereabouts.
- Enforce limits and consequences on behavior firmly and consistently.
- Allow freedom of thought and expression.

If you are doing all of those things, great! Keep on doing what you're doing. But, we need to keep in mind that this approach does not work for every parent and every child, especially as they get older. Remember that you are probably the best gauge of your child's needs and sometimes those needs include more rules rather than more freedom. Also, continue to build awareness of what is going on in your child's life by talking to other parents, family and friends. Discuss your rules with them, why you've established these rules and how you want them enforced. The best parenting balances love with limits and awareness.

Keep in mind that for some, a stricter parenting style might be more appropriate. While you are very good at setting limits, your relationship with your teen may include conflict and power struggles. You might also get frustrated trying to control your teen's behavior. You are probably very good at:

- Knowing the importance of setting limits and expectations.
- Willing to discipline your child as a way of showing how much you love and care for him.
- Keeping track of your child's behavior and whereabouts.
- Working hard to protect your teen from problem behaviors and getting into trouble.

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Conversations for Critical Times

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That's all well and good. But you have to make sure you are simultaneously creating a nurturing and warm atmosphere by verbally expressing your love for your child through praise and affection.

Make sure you listen and respect your teen's opinions, even though you may not agree. This will help keep the lines of communication open. Make sure the discipline is always consistent with the consequences you've established with your child.

And when appropriate, provide opportunities where your child can negotiate certain rules.

Take time to explain why non-negotiable rules are in place, and reinforce that it is because you love her and want her to be safe. Try to always shift your focus from what your child is doing wrong to what he's doing right. Spend more time reinforcing good behavior than punishing bad behavior.

Twenty-five years of study have shown that parents who have a strong, positive connection with their kids and use a balanced parenting style have teens that are better off overall.

Balanced parenting is where love, discipline and respect intersect. Balanced parents are warm and involved, but firm and consistent in setting and enforcing limits.

Balanced parents have relationships with their teens that include trust, mutual respect, and strong and open communication.

Balanced parents also encourage and give their teenagers the freedom to express their own ideas, beliefs and individuality.

Studies show that adolescents raised by balanced parents do better in school, report less depression and anxiety, have higher self-esteem and self-reliance, and are less likely to engage in all types of risky problem behavior, including drug and alcohol use, sex or violence.

For more information on this topic, please check out Parents. The Anti-Drug at www.theantidrug.com. And be sure to contact NCADD for literature and videos available through our Jason Surks Memorial Resource Center located at our offices in East Brunswick. Our main number is 732-254-3344 or if you prefer you can email us at mail@ncadd-middlesex.org.

Want to make a difference in your community or child's school? Why not join The Coalition for Healthy Communities today! The Coalition brings together individuals from multiple disciplines who have a passion for the prevention and treatment of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse problems. Their mission is to reduce substance abuse, especially among youth, by providing opportunities for increased collaboration, coordinated planning, and sharing of resources in order to maximize the quality and availability of services to the communities and residents of Middlesex County.

For more information and to join, please call 732-254-3344.

2009 Monitoring the Future. The results are in.

The 2009 Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey results are out and though the news is good on many fronts, there are warning signs that there may be potential problems on the horizon. Two, in particular, are of immediate concern.

The first is the continued erosion in youth attitudes and behavior toward substance abuse. Specifically, the latest MTF survey revealed that drug use among U.S. adolescents inched up between 2008 and 2009. Results from the survey also show that previous declines in marijuana, alcohol, and inhalant use have largely leveled off over the past several years.

The second significant warning sign for us here in New Jersey is the fact that ten of the fifteen states with the highest percentage of teens admitting to smoking marijuana in the last 30 days (used as an indicator of current, not just experimental, use) have lived in states with medical marijuana programs. On Monday January 11, 2010, New Jersey became the fourteenth state to send a bill to the governor's desk to legalize marijuana for medicinal purposes.

The problem is that those states that permit the selling of legalized marijuana are the same states that rank the lowest for youth perception of risk as it relates to smoking marijuana. The potential problem for New Jersey is that allowing qualified patients to use marijuana openly will inevitably strengthen the perception among our youth that marijuana is more available and more easily accessible. We have seen the same trend in recent years as youth discovered and then embraced prescription drugs.

The MTF survey should be a call to action for those of us in prevention here in New Jersey. Researchers are concerned about the apparent "softening" in teens' attitudes about the dangers of marijuana, because this shift in attitudes has always preceded an increase in use. This year's survey reports that only about 45 percent of eighth graders say they now see marijuana smoking as potentially harmful, down from 58 percent in the early 1990s. Researchers reported a similar erosion in attitudes about the dangers of drinking among teens; still the most common drug used by U.S. adolescents.

Among the encouraging results: cigarette smoking among eighth and 12th graders was at its lowest level since 1991, and the survey showed a drop in use of methamphetamine in the past year by all grades. This is encouraging, because it validates the effectiveness of new targeted prevention efforts employed to reduce the spread of methamphetamine use.

Another lesson that we never seem to learn is that we cannot focus the majority of our efforts on the hot drug of the moment at the expense of our other successful efforts. We need to expand successful prevention efforts to areas of concern rather than switch our focus from what we have done well to something new. Our current approach , to use the "hole in the dike" analogy, is to use a single plug to effectively deal with one leak but then pull that plug out of that hole as soon as another appears. What we need instead is a larger supply of plugs, so that we don't solve a new problem while allowing an old one to come back.

Monitoring the Future is an ongoing study of the behaviors, attitudes, and values of American secondary school students, college students, and young adults. Each year, a total of approximately 50,000 8th, 10th and 12th grade students are surveyed by the University of Michigan.

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Students with Parents Who Set and Enforce Clear Rules Less Likely to Report Illicit Drug Use

Youths whose parents set clear rules for them are less likely to report using illicit drugs, according to data from the 2008-09 PRIDE Survey. Middle and high school students whose parents set clear rules for them "a lot" or "often" were less likely to report using illicit drugs in the past year (12% and 21%, respectively) than students whose parents never set clear rules (49%). Similar results were found for having parents who punish them for breaking these rules. Previous studies have found that youths living in households where parents kept track of their whereabouts and set curfews were less likely to report heavy drinking.

The 2009 Pride Survey National Summary is based on the responses of 122,243 students selected from 447,532 students from 25 states who completed the Pride Survey for Grades 6 to 12 during the school year from August 2008 to June 2009. These students, while not drawn through a formal probability sampling process, do represent a broad cross-section of American youth. Results from previous years' national summaries have tracked closely with nationwide surveys such as Monitoring the Future.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from PRIDE, Questionnaire Report for Grades 6 to 12, 2008-09 National Summary – Grades 6 thru 12, 2009.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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