



Summer Is Here- Let's Preserve the Future of Our Youth

By Anna Kirzner, MSW, LCSW

Summer has arrived once again, and if you are the average parent, your day will be spent at work while your school-aged children have the summer off. To date, summertime has often been associated with increased crime, especially in urban and shore areas of New Jersey. Not only is crime rampant, but, due to economic struggles throughout the state, summer jobs for youth are scarce. Summer jobs typically provide constructive alternatives for teens. As New Jersey continues to face challenges, it is imperative that parents

are aware of what is going on in their community and assure that their youth are accounted for, spending their summer in a safe, drug-free environment.

MyCentralJersey.com explored crime in Middlesex County during the summer months, noting that nice weather draws more people out of their homes, resulting in additional risks. In 2009, five out of New Jersey's six fatal crashes during Memorial Day weekend involved alcohol and drugs. However, drugs and alcohol are not the only concern. According to the 2008

Statewide Crime Summary, youth ages 13-14 are the primary offenders of arson crimes. Additionally, more than one-quarter of all robberies were committed by juveniles. Youth were also responsible for 18 percent of violent crimes, as well as 18 percent of non-violent crimes, which resulted in 23 percent of arrests. These statistics demonstrate that youth may be at risk of being involved in a variety of dangerous situations if they are not educated on risks, safety and constructive ways to spend their time.

While the aforementioned information may sound like a bunch of numbers, a recent tragedy among youth rattled a local community this June. On June 22nd, two youths in the Carteret community of Middlesex County were shot. One Carteret High School senior, Devon Mbachu, was killed while another student was wounded and taken to University Hospital in



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Newark. This tragedy is evidence that the danger and risks in our communities are real. The negative influences are there, and it is important that we collectively acknowledge this with our youth.

Sadly, all tragedies cannot be prevented; however, parental and guardian involvement at a young age is crucial. In a *News OK* article (2008), Jo Ann Pearce outlines tips for parents in order to keep kids substance free. While it is important to be mindful of signs of drug and alcohol use, the same tips are applicable for crime, violence and other risky, unhealthy behaviors. Some of Pearce's tips follow:

- Make sure your children know about your beliefs about using drugs and alcohol.
- Be a good example.
- Be watchful for signs of drug and alcohol use and experimentation. If you suspect usage, check it out.
- Do not condone breaking the law, including drinking and smoking by minors. It sends the wrong message to kids.
- Know your kid's friends.
- Encourage your child's interests and constructive activities.
- Work with other parents to set standards for your children's behavior.
- Know that denying your child's drug and alcohol problem, blaming others, and making excuses for him/her only makes it easier for your child to use.
- Realize that if your child is using, it does NOT mean you are a bad parent or that you did something wrong.
- Listen to your child and let them know you love them no matter what.
- If your child has a problem with drugs or alcohol, get professional help right away.

These tips will not serve as a panacea to our community's problems, nor will they guarantee a better future for our youth, but it certainly gears families and communities in the right direction.

An additional option is to explore resources within your community. NCADD, in a partnership with the Carteret Public Schools developed PATHWAYS School Based Youth Services Program, which delivers a variety of services to the Carteret community, including a summer program. July 2010 will kick off the fifth year of PATHWAYS' Summer Program. The program provides opportunities for high school students to build on talents such as acting, dance, and sports; as well as become involved in their community through various community service trips including visits to local food banks and a Veterans Home. While engaging youth in structured, supervised activities, the program is geared towards team building, life skills and positive decision making. Such programs not only keep kids off the streets but also allow for opportunities to learn and grow.

See if your town has similar summer programs, particularly for teens. If not, reach out to NCADD, we may be able to help get one started for next year!

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PARENTING STYLE LINKED TO HEAVY

DRINKING IN KIDS

This should not come as a shock to you, but teens with lax parents are more likely to drink heavily than teens with strict but supportive parents.

This and other findings have come to light as a result of a study by Brigham Young University (BYU).

BYU scholars suggest that parenting style can strongly influence teen drinking. This is especially true of binge drinking, generally defined as having five or more drinks in a row over a relatively short period of time. Adolescents whose parents were authoritative were less likely to drink heavily than adolescents who experienced the other parenting styles.

The study also tells us that:

- Authoritative parents rank high in discipline and monitoring (accountability) and high in support and warmth.
- Authoritarian parents rank high in control, but low in warmth and support.
- Indulgent parents rank high in warmth and support, but low in accountability.
- Teens least likely to drink heavily gave their parents high marks on scales of accountability and warmth.
- Kids who said their parents were warm and indulgent, meaning parents required less accountability, were three times more likely to report heavy drinking.
- Kids who rated their parents as high on accountability but low on warmth were twice as likely to engage in heavy drinking.

Those of us who work in prevention have known this for years, which is why

programs such as *Footprints for Life*[™] and *Strengthening Families* were developed and are currently being implemented right here in Middlesex County by NCADD.

We developed *Footprints* to help young children build a strong foundation of life skills rooted in key social competencies. The social competencies that *Footprints* addresses are planning and decision-making practice, interpersonal skills, cultural competence, peer pressure, and peaceful conflict resolution — assets identified as promoting positive attitudes and behaviors.

Similarly, *Strengthening Families* is a program designed to prevent substance abuse in youth by helping them to build skills and giving parents more tools to help their children become responsible young adults. The program also helps families improve the relationship between parents and youth and decreases the level of family conflict.

We all know that the adolescent period is a transitional period for both youth and their caregivers. Parents sometimes have a hard time navigating through that period.

While peers are very important, it's not true that parents have no influence. If you want to have a positive influence on your teen's decisions regarding substance abuse, it takes work - having both accountability and support in your relationship with your adolescents. The worst thing you can do is be neglectful in your parenting.

... And remember. NCADD is here to help!

Source: Bahr, S.J., et al. "Parenting Style, Religiosity, Peers, and Adolescent Heavy Drinking." Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs. July 2010.

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NEWS YOU SHOULD KNOW AND USE

STUDIES FIND CHILDREN OF SMOKERS AT RISK FOR CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Children of parents who smoke are more likely to have a higher body-mass index and greater prevalence of behavioral problems, according to a pair of new studies.

A study from the University of Bristol in England found conduct and externalizing behavior problems at a higher rate among children of mothers who smoked prenatally, compared to those with no exposure.

Meanwhile, in a second study, researchers from the University of Hong Kong reported a .10 percent higher average body mass index at age 7 for children with parents who smoked pre- or post natally. This increased to .16 percent by age 11.

The above report was provided by Join Together a program of the Boston University School of Public Health and is the nation's leading provider of information, strategic planning assistance, and leadership development for community-based efforts to advance effective alcohol and drug policy, prevention, and treatment. To learn more about this organization and to subscribe to their newsletters, please go to the Join Together website at www.jointogether.org.

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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