



NJ Parents Recognize their Role in Drug-Prevention

When it comes to accessing drugs and alcohol, many New Jersey parents acknowledge that the main source for their children may be their own home.

More than 45 percent of New Jersey parents think their kids are getting alcohol out of their home liquor cabinet, and three-quarters of parents feel that kids get prescription and over-the-counter drugs out of medicine cabinets, either from their own home or from a friend's medicine cabinet, according to the finding of the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey (PDFNJ) 9th Annual Tracking Survey of Parents' Attitudes & Behaviors Toward Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention.

The Survey also found that:

- New Jersey parents, by the simple act of eating a meal with their child, are creating an environment for their children to feel comfortable about approaching them with discussions about drugs and alcohol. In fact, parents of families who eat five to seven meals together per week

continue to be more likely to feel they have a lot of influence on their child's attitudes towards drugs and alcohol.

- More New Jersey parents are realizing the growing dangers of prescription drug abuse and were encouraged by the recent American Medicine Chest Challenge (AMCC) campaign. AMCC's national day of disposal of unused, unwanted and expired medicine collected over two tons of medicine. However, the Study found that that 42 percent of New Jersey parents reported they currently still have unused, unwanted or expired medicine in their home, providing easy access to these dangerous and deadly drugs.



- Parents lack knowledge on ecstasy, inhalants, methamphetamines and heroin; however, the more frequent the exposure to drug prevention public service announcements (PSAs) the more aware they became about the risks of using drugs and alcohol and the more encouraged they became to speak with their children about the risks of using and abusing drugs. Seven in ten (69 percent) parents say they see or hear public service announcements telling them about the risks of drugs or alcohol at least one time per week.

Parents are also getting the message about the dangers of underage drinking, as 71 percent of parents of a 12 to 15 year old child said their child would never be allowed to drink when they are older in their late teens, up from 67percent last year, and at the highest level since 2006.

The complete survey results are available at www.drugfreenj.org/_modules/study/2011_parenttrack.pdf.

Remembering Jason

By Judy Shepps Battle

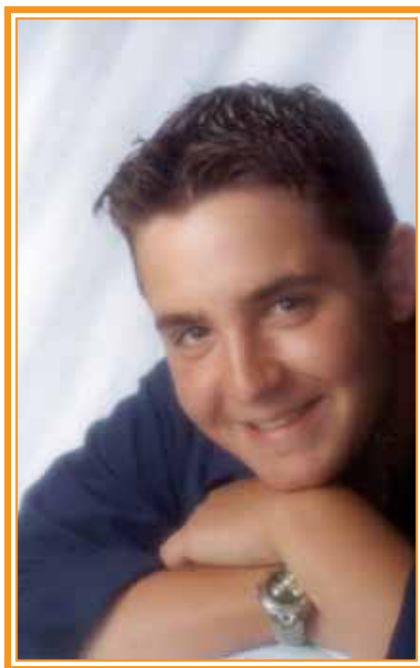
Jason's death was a shock to his family, friends, and the South Brunswick community. No one thought that this intelligent, industrious, family-oriented young man would ever be one to abuse illegal drugs.

On December 17, 2003, South Brunswick residents Linda and Mark Surks' phone rang with the news every parent dreads. It was St. Michael's Medical Center, saying their 19-year-old son Jason had been brought into the emergency room very ill and that they needed to come immediately.

When they arrived, the hospital staff had a grim update. Jason had passed away from an accidental overdose of the anti-anxiety drug Xanax, a medication his parents knew he had never been legally prescribed. It has been eight years since that day and Linda's memory remains vivid.

"We drove to Newark in silence, each deep in our own thoughts of what we could be facing. That day was the first time I became aware of Jason's drug use."

Linda and Mark later learned that Jason had been purchasing a variety of non-prescribed medications from a Mexican pharmacy



website for at least six months before his death. These drugs included both Xanax and the potent painkiller Oxycontin.

It is still a mystery why, as a second-year pre-pharmacy major, Jason would have risked his life taking these drugs recreationally. Surely he knew the physical dangers of both medications and their high potential for addiction.

Perhaps he felt bullet-proof since these were not street drugs. Or he reasoned that since no adverse effects had happened, there would be none on that fateful December day.

We will never know his thought process, only that his calculations were dead wrong.

Jason Todd Surks

His life was successful. He was attending Rutgers University in Newark, had close ties to his parents and 15-year-old sister, Meryl, and held a part-time job at a local pharmacy where he was well regarded. He had an abundance of friends.

Jason attended Brunswick Acres Elementary School, Crossroads Middle School, and South Brunswick High School, where he was a part of the band and played the clarinet, as well as other instruments, if needed. At home, he enjoyed the piano and guitar.

Theater was also a strong interest, and Jason starred in several plays, both at school and at camp. In his spare time, he participated in a variety of sports, including baseball, basketball, soccer, and golf.

Finally, while in high school, he worked part time at what was then the Franklin Park Pharmacy, the current site of the Think Grill on Route 27 and Henderson Road. When the pharmacy closed, Jason worked part time at the CVS Pharmacy on Route 27 in Franklin Park.

In short, he was an outstanding young man with a bright future who engaged in risky behaviors with regard

to the prescription drug misuse that ended his life.

Prescription Drug Abuse Continues to Rise

I wish I could say that Jason's untimely death was an isolated case of misjudgment. However, prescription drug abuse in his age group (18–25 years of age) has continued to increase in the eight years since this tragic event.

The current estimate is that 25 percent of 18–25 year olds will abuse prescription painkillers during their lifetime.¹

That's one of every four young adults who are willing to play Russian roulette with their lives by swallowing pills prescribed for someone else. Unfortunately, this same trend in is found in today's high school seniors.

The 2010 Monitoring the Future national survey found that 15 percent of this group admitted to at least one such episode in the past year. This figure jumps to nearly 22 percent when asked if misuse of prescription drugs has taken place at any time in their lifetime.²

Where are these seniors getting these drugs? Studies show that family and friends are the primary source of supply. That is no surprise, as most family medicine cabinets do not come with a lock.

Frankly, these statistics scare me.

There is a Solution

Since the time of Jason's death, Linda Surks has been tireless in her efforts to increase public and professional awareness of the potentially deadly consequences of prescription drug abuse.



As a prevention specialist working at the Middlesex County chapter of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), she has channeled her grief in losing Jason in a variety of positive directions, including:

- Coordinating the Coalition for Healthy Communities, which focuses at least 50 percent of its resources to prescription drug abuse education activities, such as the "Take Back" programs in Middlesex County, educating pharmacists about the problem, and the "Be Smart about Medicine" creative expression contest for middle school students³

- Partnering with families suffering a similar loss by sponsoring the Vigil for Lost Promise in June 2006⁴
- Speaking nationally through the media and before Congress

I asked Linda what message she would like to give to parents with regard to this critical area. Her response was simple and to the point: "Talk about alcohol and drugs with your children from an early age, and always include medicine as part of that conversation. Monitor and secure all medication in your home, and dispose of it when expired or no longer needed."

About this column: Judy Shepps Battle is a New Jersey resident, addictions specialist, consultant and freelance writer. She can be reached by e-mail at writeaction@aol.com. Additional information on this and other topics can be found at her website at <http://www.writeaction.com/>. This article appeared in the 8/31/2011 edition of the South Brunswick Patch at <http://southbrunswick.patch.com>.

Sources:

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4. <http://www.drugwarrant.net/vigil/>

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New Parent Helpline Provides Support, Resources for Teen Substance Abuse

When parents find out their teen is abusing drugs or alcohol, the family's immediate focus is generally on getting help for the teen. But parents are often in great need of help themselves. They may need advice on what to say to their teen, how to evaluate whether he or she needs professional treatment and where to find the appropriate substance abuse treatment program if one is needed. A new toll-free telephone helpline is providing that assistance.

The Parents Toll-Free Helpline, 1-855-DRUGFREE (1-855-378-4373), is staffed by clinical social workers with practical experience in substance abuse prevention and treatment. The helpline, launched by The Partnership at Drugfree.org, offers bilingual support (English/Spanish).

The helpline counselors are extensively trained in scientifically proven intervention techniques to assist parents in communicating with their children and find appropriate help when it is needed. The counselors are also trained in using community reinforcement and family training (CRAFT), which is designed for concerned parents and others to help their loved ones who have problems with drugs or alcohol get into appropriate treatment. The underlying components of CRAFT include teaching effective communication skills, positive reinforcement and contingency management techniques which help parents form a new dialogue with their children.

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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