

PCN Forum Recap

Teens and Chemical Use Prevention

Facing the Fears, Fascination and Keeping the Family Focused

March 23, 2009

Speaker: Scott Washburn, M.A., L.A.D.C

If Scott Washburn had one message he wanted to convey to all parents, it would be: **“Don’t stick your head in the sand!”** It’s the “most common parenting problem” that he sees with respect to alcohol and drug use among our kids. He had lots of parenting tips for navigating this topic in a culture in which there are so many messages in the media to counteract. His first advice was to remember that:

- Good parenting produces teens who can still make mistakes
- Great teens can make poor choices
- Parenting teens is not having **control**, its having **influence** over their choices
- Mistakes are opportunities for learning
- Preventive parenting is reducing risks, not eliminating them
- Parenting can be effective but not foolproof (“you still need to be on your toes!”)

Stay knowledgeable about alcohol and drug use in your kids’ community

Learn about what your child is facing at school and social situations. Washburn presented the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey results:

| Edina Teens saying “no” to the following: | 9 th Grade | 12 th Grade |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Tobacco | 89% | 85% |
| Alcohol | 78% | 45% |
| Marijuana | 89% | 76% |
| Binge Drinking | 88% | 67% |

The good news is that the majority of Edina teens are making healthy choices by saying no to tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and binge drinking. The **alarming news is that alcohol use in grade 12 almost doubles from that in grade 9:**

| Use in the past 30 days | 9 th Grade | 12 th Grade |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Tobacco | 9% | 15% |
| Alcohol | 22% | 55% |
| Marijuana | 11% | 24% |
| Binge Drinking | 12% | 33% |

Tobacco (nicotine): The “gateway drug” meaning that kids usually start with cigarettes and continue into other areas quickly. If you find that your kid is using tobacco, **make an issue of it!**

Alcohol: A big challenge in our culture. Talk to kids about appropriate use versus inappropriate use. Be aware of what you are modeling.

Marijuana: Talk to your teens about damage to lungs and brain. This can be confusing to teens given the current dialogue in our culture regarding the medicinal use of marijuana.

Binge drinking: Educate kids about the extreme danger of high blood/alcohol levels.

Washburn reminded us of David Walsh's research on the teen brain and its being "under construction" and very vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse, causing significant damage to the learning and memory centers of the brain. "High Times" can lead to low functioning for years to come. Teens are 2-3 times more vulnerable to the negative effects of alcohol than adults.

Three student panelists, two from Minnetonka HS and a third from Edina HS, were on hand to share actual observations from the life of a senior in HS. They all reported that there is a thriving "party scene" at their schools. Some kids choose to use tobacco and alcohol during the school hours, either chewing tobacco, going out to their cars to drink or smoke during lunch break, bringing alcohol to school in water bottles and lots of planning to weekend parties.

Common places to "party" are backyard bonfires where parents don't check-up (the smoke from the bonfire can conceal the smell of tobacco), "pre-gaming" parties before sports events like hockey or football games, Basements with easy walk-out/in access; homes where the parents are gone and/or clueless and/or providing alcohol. As a parent, know where your child is planning to be and have the courage to call the parents of that home and check-in. Sleepovers are a very common way for kids to ignore a curfew and stay out all night.

Sober Squad: Some kids band together and decide that they will wait until they are 21 before they will use alcohol. This can be a positive peer influence. Remember, this shows a sign of intent on your teen's part but other pressures will still be there.

What parents can do to reduce risks:

- **Establish firm, personal beliefs:** i.e. underage drinking is not ok, it is terribly harmful to the adolescent brain
- **Communicate clear expectations and consequences:** loss of driving privileges etc. Remember, kids can learn from their mistakes and sometimes a difficult consequence will hinder risk taking.
- **Always follow-through with consequences**
- **Maintain Good Relationships:** let your teen earn your trust, listen to their stories and refrain from judgment about their friends (however, keep a close watch over friends who may be making poor choices) Keep On-going conversation: questions to ask:
 - What do you hear about Alcohol and drug use?
 - What do you see on weekends?
 - Have you had any offers to use? How have you handled it?
 - What can we do as parents to make it worth it to you not to use alcohol/drugs?

Remember, communication is two-way. LISTEN to your teen. 60% of communication is non-verbal (tone, posture, body language) Listen with your eyes as well as your ears.

- **Practice good networking:** Call the parents of your kid's friends, check up on how much supervision they will have. Introduce yourself, get to know the parents of your kid's friends.
- **Check out Teen's plan:** ask where they will be and when, then do a check-in
- **Role Model responsible behavior**
- **Family Dinners:** Incredibly important even every other Friday night. Teens might not say they like it but "it's not bad...!"
- **Hug and sniff:** Stay up to greet your teen as they return from the evening
- **Have the courage to deal with the issue directly**

- **Seek Resources**—don't put your head in the sand!