

Three Village Central School District
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Partners

HOME
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WORKING TOGETHER to Tackle Teenage Drug & Alcohol Use

The Three Village Central School District, in concert with local law enforcement officials and health care representatives, hosted their second drug and alcohol awareness forum at the end of October for parents and students. The program was focused on educating attendees on the signs and symptoms of abuse and was well attended by the community. Last June, the District hosted a similar program, which focused on prevention.

"This is an issue that effects school districts all over the world and we cannot put our heads in the sand and pretend it

is not a part of our community," stated Interim Superintendent of Schools Donald F. Webster. "The more aware we are the better we can understand and the more proactive we can be."

Throughout the multi-hour event, a panel of presenters, including District principals, social workers, a health teacher, parent and student representatives, a Suffolk County police officer and health professionals, along with a Stony Brook University Hospital Emergency Room Physician, shared their experiences with the topic and fielded questions from the audience.

Signs & Symptoms

How can I tell if my child is using drugs? This is a common question parents have been asking for years. While it is important to note that the symptoms listed below often indicate drug use, the presence of some of these behaviors could be the product of adolescent stress. The key thing to keep in mind is **changes** in behavior.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Loss/increase of appetite
- Slowed or staggered walking
- Inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness
- Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual; blank stare
- Cold, sweaty palms; shaking hands
- Puffy face, blushing or paleness
- Smell of substance on breath, body or clothes
- Extreme hyperactivity/excessive talkativeness
- Needle marks on lower arm, leg or bottom of feet
- Nausea, vomiting, or excessive sweating
- Tremors or shakes of hands, feet or head
- Irregular heartbeat

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- Change in overall attitude/personality with no other identifiable cause
- Changes in friends/new hangouts
- Change in activities or hobbies
- Drop in grades at school or performance at work; skips school or is late for school
- Change in habits at home; loss of interest in family and family activities
- Difficulty in paying attention/forgetfulness
- Drastic changes in mood
- Excessive need for privacy; unreachable
- Chronic dishonesty
- Unexplained need for money, stealing money or items
- Change in personal grooming habits
- Possession of drug paraphernalia

Facts to Note

- *In 2008, 15.4 percent of twelfth graders reported using a prescription drug non-medically within the past year. This category includes amphetamines, sedatives/barbiturates, tranquilizers, and opiates other than heroin. Vicodin continues to be abused at unacceptably high levels. Many of the drugs used by twelfth graders are prescription drugs or, in the case of cough medicine, are available over the counter.*
- *Youths ages 12-17 who believed their parents would strongly disapprove of their using a particular substance were less likely to use that substance than youths who believed their parents would somewhat disapprove or neither approve nor disapprove.*
- *Studies show that one in 20 teens will use heroin in their lifetime.*

Save the Date

UPCOMING DISTRICT DRUG & ALCOHOL AWARENESS FORUM

Monday, March 1, 2010 starting at 7:00 p.m. at Ward Melville HS
Special presentation by Dr. Stephen Dewey on "The Effects of Drugs Abuse on the Human Brain"

Commonly Used Drugs & Their Symptoms

The American Council for Drug Education's website provides the following information:

Marijuana: Glassy, red eyes; loud talking and inappropriate laughter followed by sleepiness; a sweet burnt scent; loss of interest, motivation; weight gain or loss.

Alcohol: Clumsiness; difficulty walking; slurred speech; sleepiness; poor judgment; dilated pupils; possession of a false ID card.

Depressants: (including barbiturates and tranquilizers) Seems drunk as if from alcohol but without the associated odor of alcohol; difficulty concentrating; clumsiness; poor judgment; slurred speech; sleepiness; contracted pupils.

Stimulants: Hyperactivity; euphoria; irritability; anxiety; excessive talking followed by depression or excessive sleeping at odd times; may go long periods of time without eating or sleeping; dilated pupils; weight loss; dry mouth and nose.

Inhalants: (including glues, aerosols, and vapors) Watery eyes; impaired vision, memory, and thought; secretions from the nose or rashes around the nose and mouth; headaches and nausea; appearance of intoxication; drowsiness; poor muscle control; changes in appetite; anxiety; irritability; an unusual number of spray cans in the trash.

Hallucinogens: Dilated pupils; bizarre and irrational behavior including paranoia, aggression, hallucinations; mood swings; detachment from people; absorption with self or other objects, slurred speech; confusion.

Heroin: Needle marks; sleeping at unusual times; sweating; vomiting; coughing and sniffing; twitching; loss of appetite; contracted pupils; no response of pupils to light.

Tobacco/Nicotine: Smell of tobacco; stained fingers or teeth.

To snoop or not to snoop?

If you suspect your child is drinking or using drugs, examining their personal belongings can be the first step in helping to keep them safe. For many parents, "snooping" can sound like a negative word, but it is important to remember that it is *your* home and *your* child. Although you want to respect your child's independence and privacy, it should never be at the price of his or her health or safety. Some key places to look include:

- Dresser/desk drawers beneath or between clothes
- CD/DVD/Tape/Video cases
- Small boxes (ex., Jewelry, make-up, or pencil cases)
- Backpacks/duffle bags
- In a plant, buried in the dirt
- In between books on a shelf
- Inside books with pages removed
- Under a loose plank in floor boards
- Inside over-the-counter medicine containers
- Inside empty candy bags

Also, it's important to review your child's cell phone call log and text or instant messages.

See *Something* – Say *Something*

The District's partnership with The Safe School Helpline continues throughout the 2009-2010 school year. Residents are encouraged to use this service to report any facts, remarks, or actions that could jeopardize the safety of students, staff, or the schools. Reports can be made day or night and are kept anonymous. Reports can be made by calling 1-800-4-1-VOICE, ext. 359 or via the web at www.safeschoolhelpline.com.

Don't Fear, There is Help

If you're at all concerned that your teenager is using drugs or alcohol it is important to take action now in order to help your child get back on track to a healthy life. Information about how to talk to your child and resources for students is available with the click of a button. Some helpful websites include:

- www.drugfree.org This website includes a drug guide for parents, including pictures of what drugs look like, alternative names for drugs, how they are used, and other important facts about the top 13 drugs commonly used by teens.
- www.TimetoTalk.org This website provides resources to help parents talk to their kids about drugs and alcohol.
- www.timetoact.drugfree.org This website includes information on how to tell if a teen is using and ways to take action to intervene.
- www.teens.drugabuse.gov The National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens provides information in student-friendly language, including how drugs affect the brain and body and free downloads and resources for students.

Additionally, the District's social workers, guidance counselors, psychologists, and entire administrative team can also be vital resources.

Resources: The National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens website www.teens.drugabuse.gov; www.TimetoTalk.org; www.drugfree.org; Students Against Destructive Decisions website www.sadd.org; www.drugabuse.gov; the American Council for Drug Education website www.acde.org.

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