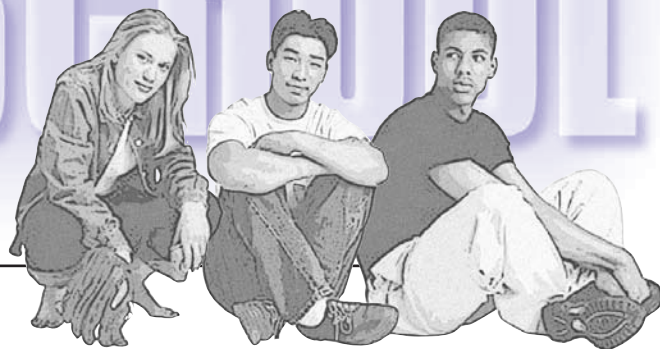


HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT



Drugs and alcohol— Helping teens make wise choices

With all of the information available to teens, parents may wonder why their children would even consider experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, steroids, or other drugs. But a combination of youthful defiance, fearlessness, curiosity, and peer pressure can lead teens to ignore the risks and make the unthinkable a reality. Understanding the pressures on teens to use drugs and alcohol, and learning to identify the early signs of substance abuse, can help parents tackle this difficult issue.

Why teens try drugs and alcohol

Schools, parents, law enforcement agencies, and anti-drug groups routinely warn of the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately television, music, friends, sports idols, and even some parents often suggest that using drugs or alcohol is “not so bad.” In this confusing environment, teens may view substance abuse as a means to:

- ▶ Open the doors to certain friends or social groups.
- ▶ Have “fun” by drinking or getting high.
- ▶ Feel more like an adult.
- ▶ Experience the thrill of doing something risky.
- ▶ Escape struggles with poor self-esteem, depression, or a troubled home life.
- ▶ Improve performance by staying awake to complete school work, building strength and size to make a sports team, or even believing that drugs may enhance creativity.

Identifying signs of possible trouble

By observing their children’s appearance, behavior, and friends, parents can identify early clues that their children may be experimenting with alcohol or drugs. Although it is important to respect a teen’s desire for independence and personal space, it is equally important for parents to protect children from a potential crisis of substance abuse. These simple ideas may help:

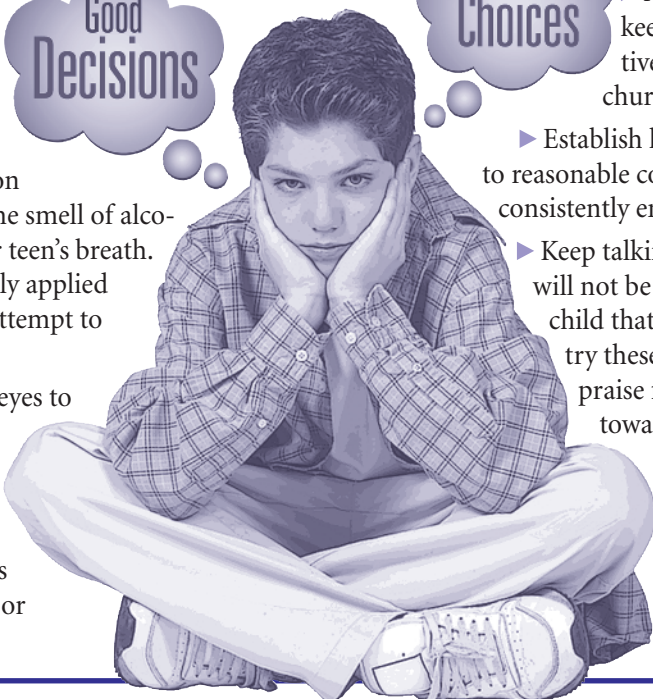
- ▶ **Trust your nose**—A brief face-to-face chat (not a yelled conversation through a closed door) may reveal the smell of alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana on your teen’s breath. Chewing gum, breath mints or freshly applied aftershave or perfume might be an attempt to hide any telltale odors.
- ▶ **Look closely**—Marijuana causes the eyes to become red and heavy lidded with small pupils. Alcohol produces large pupils and gives a red, flushed color to the face and cheeks. Other drugs may cause nose bleeds, sores or spots around the mouth or nose, clothing or skin burns, or needle marks.

- ▶ **Watch for extreme mood changes**—Is your quiet child suddenly loud and obnoxious or your athlete unusually clumsy? Although there are a number of reasons for a child to be moody, remain aware of the possibility of substance use.
- ▶ **Check for physical evidence of trouble**—Unexplained scrapes and dents in the car might suggest your child has been driving under the influence. Bottles, cans, or drug paraphernalia can turn up in the car, a bedroom, the garbage can, or even the laundry.
- ▶ **Be aware of lies or secrets**—Missed curfews or alibis and explanations that don’t fit may suggest that your child is hiding something more serious.
- ▶ **Monitor school performance**—Declining grades or a sudden disinterest in hobbies or sports may be signs that the desire to get drunk or high has become a top priority in a teen’s life.
- ▶ **Missing alcohol, cigarettes, prescriptions, money, or valuables**—Substance abuse is expensive. Teens may start out sneaking alcohol or cigarettes from their parents and end up stealing money or valuables to buy their own.
- ▶ **Trust your instincts with friends**—Teens make new friends all of the time; it’s natural. But if the new friends give you reasons to worry, it might be time to pay closer attention to them.

Preventing substance use

Benjamin Franklin’s expression, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” holds true when it comes to helping teens make wise choices. Sound parenting skills offer your teen a strong defense against the pressures of drugs and alcohol. Some simple suggestions include:

- ▶ Begin talking with your child at an early age regarding alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs before the temptation to experiment strikes. Be clear that using drugs or alcohol is both illegal and unacceptable.
- ▶ Avoid idle time and boredom by keeping your teen involved in positive activities such as sports, clubs, or church or civic groups.
- ▶ Establish household rules for your teen. Agree to reasonable consequences for bad behavior, and consistently enforce the rules.
- ▶ Keep talking with your teen. One conversation will not be enough. Occasionally remind your child that you are aware of the pressures to try these substances. And don’t forget a little praise for good behavior can go a long way toward avoiding trouble.
- ▶ Know your child’s friends. Friends who avoid cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs reinforce your message that not everyone “is doing it.”





IN IT TOGETHER:

Preventing Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Few, if any, parents want to believe that their children could develop alcohol or substance abuse problems. The reality for local parents is that the rate of youth drug arrests in Schenectady County is higher than the state average, according to the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (www.oasas.state.ny.us). When problems impact the school environment, Schalmont High School personnel work with students and their parents to tackle the challenges created by drugs and alcohol.

Schalmont HS social worker John Condemmi said, "Drugs and alcohol affect our community like any other." He and Candace Madej, another HS social worker, help students and their families deal with a variety of issues that negatively impact the school environment.

According to Madej, "When students abuse drugs or alcohol, episodically or on a regular basis, it affects all aspects of their life – academics, motivation, goal setting, physical well-being, and peer



"Communication early on is key."

interactions." A family member's alcohol or substance abuse also can dramatically change a student's academic performance. The student may be distracted in school or start to skip school entirely because he or she "isn't being

supervised as well as might be expected."

School nurse Sandy VanEtten said, "A lot of the problem with alcohol and drug use is that it's a source of stress management for kids." She encourages students to instead turn to exercise as a healthy stress reliever, noting that alcohol actually leaves the user in a depressive state afterwards.

Alcohol and substance abuse prevention is a team effort. At Schalmont HS, social workers, guidance counselors, the school resource officer, teachers, administrators, and the school nurse all work together to educate students about the dangers of substance abuse and to help students develop more healthy coping skills. Social workers and guidance counselors also counsel students through the turmoil caused by substance abuse and refer families to outside community resources if serious

treatment measures become necessary.

Parents are an important part of the team, too. Madej said, "Communication early on is key. Make sure your children know your values and why you feel that way."

Mark your CALENDAR

NOTE: All events at Schalmont High School unless otherwise noted.

April

- 3** FOM Meeting @ HS Library, 7 p.m.
- 7** Board of Education Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.
- 9-10** HS Drama Club Production, 6:30 p.m.
- 11** HS Report Cards Issued
- 14-18** NO SCHOOL – Spring Recess
- 22** Hockey Assoc. Meeting @ Rotterdam Library, 7 p.m.
- 24** MS/HS Jazz Night & Ziti Dinner
- 28** Board of Education Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.

May

- 12** Board of Education Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.
- 13** Hockey Assoc. Meeting @ Rotterdam Library, 7 p.m.
- 14** Athletic Assoc. Meeting, 7 p.m.
- 15** HS Concert, 7 p.m.
- 16** HS Junior Prom @ Riverstone Manor, 7 p.m.
- 20** BUDGET VOTE, 6 a.m. - 9 p.m.
- 22** HS Interim Reports issued
- 23-26** NO SCHOOL – Memorial Day
- 27** Board of Education Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.
- 29** HS Senior Awards Ceremony, 7 p.m.
- 30** HS Senior Banquet @ Pinehaven Country Club, 6 p.m.

DON'T FORGET to sign up to receive the latest high school news through Schalmont's School News Notifier at www.schalmont.org!

Online Resources

Try these online resources for more information on communicating with your teen about alcohol and substance abuse:

- ▶ National Institute on Drug Abuse: <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/havefun/index.asp>
- ▶ Partnership for a Drug-Free America: <http://www.drugfree.org>
- ▶ U.S. Department of Health and Family Services: <http://family.samhsa.gov/>

