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Proms and Graduation, Stress Heighten Risk of Teen Alcohol and Drug Use

Parents Best Line of Defense: New Resources Available to Help

With prom and graduation season fast approaching, teens and parents are riding a roller coaster of emotions. Mixed with the new experiences and temptations that greet each milestone is increased stress that many students feel from school, peer pressure and the recession. As a consequence, many teens who have yet to develop the necessary coping skills are at risk of turning to unhealthy behaviors, such as drug use and drinking.

Teens report feeling greater pressure to drink or use drugs during spring weekends, proms and graduation. Multiple surveys have also found that stressed-out teens are significantly more likely to drink, get drunk, smoke or use illegal drugs than those who feel little stress. A recent study from the Scarborough Kids Internet Panel (S.K.I.P.), which tracks youth behavior and sentiment, found that 74 percent of teens are worried about the economy, including 23 percent who are “very worried.”

Research has consistently found that parents are the most effective inoculation against youth alcohol and drug use. Teens who learn a lot about the risks of taking drugs, including prescription medicines, from their parents are half as likely to ever use.

Within the privacy of their own homes, parents and caregivers can find extensive help on how to handle this touchy subject with their teen and what to do for those concerned that their kids are experimenting through the federal Office of National Drug Control Policy National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America (PDFA).

“As we work to prevent young people from abusing drugs and alcohol, teens aren’t the only ones who need support; parents do, too,” said state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Commissioner, Thomas A. Kirk, Jr., Ph.D. “Today’s moms and dads also rely on the Web as an important source of information. With so much out there, we want to make sure they have a variety of reliable resources to get the help they’re seeking.”

The Partnership for Drug-Free America has launched Time to Act!, <http://timetoact.drugfree.org>, the first online resource specifically for parents who suspect or already know that their kids are using. The site provides an easy-to-use, step-by-step guide to help parents identify and confront their child's early-stage drug and alcohol use. The PDFA's Web site, www.drugfree.org, also includes Time To Talk, which provides parents tips on how to start the conversation and what to say.

The National Youth Anti-Media Campaign's Web site, www.TheAntiDrug.com, also offers educational advice for parents. Expanded content includes a section on helping teens manage stress and a new expert column. Publications and multi-media materials also can be ordered at no charge from the site's resource section. For free bulk orders, call 1-800-788-2800.

The latest materials include:

* *Navigating the Teen Years: A Parent's Handbook for Raising Healthy Teens*, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, is packed with useful tips and expert advice on how parents can tune into their teens, set rules and expectations, and monitor them through their adolescent years.

* *The Teen Years: A Roadmap for Parents* is an interactive CD-ROM that provides in-depth information about how your teen is developing throughout adolescence and offers expert advice for parents on how to best guide their teen through this transition.

* *Keeping Your Teens Drug-Free: A Family Guide* specifically addresses the importance of family as a drug deterrent and notes simple techniques that even busy parents can use to help prevent drug use. Versions specifically written for African American and Hispanic parents are also available.

* *The Abuse of Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs*, a valuable brochure for parents, is a guide to preventing prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse among teens, highlighting signs and symptoms of abuse as well as steps parents can take to safeguard and properly dispose of their medications.

For additional parents resources, visit DMHAS at www.ct.gov/dmhas or The Governor's Prevention Partnership at www.preventionworksct.org/parents.html.