

# An Issue of Influence...

## Back to School: Parents are still a Vital Influence

As school begins again and our schedules take on more of a routine, parents settle in and to some extent, take for granted that children are in a safe and structured environment. To some parents school can be seen as a type of stand in parent. We think that while in school, our kids are busy going to class, doing homework, playing sports, going over to their friends' house and being kids under the watchful eyes of other adults. But even if getting back into "the routine" can make us more settled, we cannot let our awareness decrease of what our children are doing and who they are doing it with. In fact, **the level of exposure to alcohol, tobacco and drugs may increase for our children when they get back into school routine.**

The 13th annual "back-to-school survey" by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University tracks attitudes of youth and those, like parents, who influence them. This year 1,002 teens, age 12 to 17 (503 boys, 499 girls), and 312 of the parents of these teens were surveyed. The results of this year's survey indicate that, although virtually all mothers and fathers are concerned about the challenges of raising their kids in today's world, many fail to take essential actions to prevent their kids from smoking, drinking or using drugs.

One result of many previous years of research is that youth with parents that are "hands on"—involved in their youths' day to day lives, spending time relaxing with them, eating meals together, providing active supervision, keeping lines of communication open, establishing and modeling standards of behavior, and setting positive examples—are much less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs. Also revealed by this year's survey is that far

too many parents pass up these opportunities, opportunities that are proven to help them raise their children to make healthy decisions. We need to remember that as parents, our actions—and inactions—can result in us becoming part of the problem of teen alcohol and drug abuse instead of part of the solution.

### Why it is so important to stay involved

Current research is showing that there are main periods of growth in the brain: During a baby's development in the womb up until about 18 months of age and again in early adolescence. After this period of growth comes a period of change in the brain where information that is used becomes "hard-wired" in the brain and then covered with an insulating material to protect the information pathways that will be come permanent in the brain. The other information is discarded or pruned from the brain. The phrase "use it or lose it" plays a major role in adolescent brain development. Along with this process, some areas of the brain do not fully develop until about age 25. Those parts control impulses, reasoning, problem solving, judgment, planning, short-term memory, language, social mirroring and more. What does this mean for parents? It means that modeling good behavior, teaching our children how to behave and reason through things, helping them practice how to handle difficult decisions, and learn to change behavior based on mistakes they have made. It means investing time in them to give them the tools they need to become a successful adult.

It is *An Issue of Influence...*



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### For more information:

[hubbardcountydrugfree.org](http://hubbardcountydrugfree.org)

### Learning Strategies for the Developing Brain:

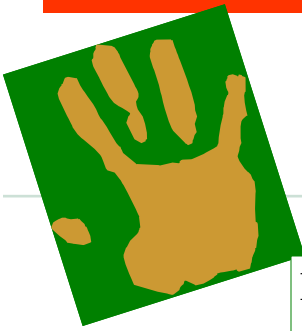
Show them how things fit together. Add some rhythm and rhyme.

Attaching emotion can help learning. Humor is good, sarcasm is not. Make things real to them, something they can feel.

Social interaction helps learning. Discussion helps them put context to what they are learning.

Practice, practice, practice! But make sure they are understanding by questioning what they have learned.

Visual Aids, Stories and Hands On work best for youth learning. Creating a context pulls them in and gives meaning to what they are learning.



## Four areas for parents to focus on:

### School Night Socializing

A huge difference in perception occurred in this survey as to where teens hung out on a school night. 46% of teens stated they hung out at a friend's, but only 14% of parents stated that their kids usually left the house to hang out with friends on a school night. Not knowing where your child is and what he or she is doing at 10:00 p.m. on a school night appears to be a risky situation. Half of teens surveyed that come home after 10:00 p.m. said that use of alcohol, marijuana or other drugs occurred among the kids they're with. This percentage changes little whether they are out and about or at a friend's house.

### Prescription Drugs

One-third of the teens who know a prescription drug abuser say that kids who abuse prescription drugs get them from home or the medicine cabinet or from parents. Another one-third say prescription drugs can be acquired from friends or classmates, most likely from their own homes. Last year there was a 46 percent increase in the percentage of teens who say prescription drugs are the substance they can most easily obtain. For the first time for this survey, prescription drugs are easier for teens to get than beer.

### Risk for Kids to Use at School

One-third of parents surveyed said that the presence of drugs in the school their child attends does not increase the risk that their child will use drugs. However, research consistently demonstrates that the presence of drugs in school is harmful to the entire student body, increasing the risk that students at such schools will use them. While almost all parents say it is important that their teen's school is drug free, only 39 percent of parents who say there are drugs in their teens' schools believe the goal of making the school drug free is realistic. Just thinking it is important does not stop kids from having access to drugs at school.

### Setting a Good Example

Preventing substance abuse among youth is primarily a parenting issue. As parents, we all need to look in the mirror and ask ourselves: Am I doing what it takes to help my child make it through their youth free of tobacco, alcohol and drugs? Almost a ratio of nine out of ten parents surveyed (84 percent) said that compared to the time when they were growing up, it is harder to keep teenagers safe and a ratio of three of four parents (72 percent) said is harder to raise a teen "of good moral character." The survey also found that teens that have seen their parents drunk are much more likely themselves to get drunk, use marijuana, or smoke cigarettes, compared to other teens. As parents, we need to model proper behavior to our children. They are in process of training their brains to have what is necessary for them to function as an adult. This time in their lives is as crucial as when they were infants and toddlers to have guidance and protection from their parents and other adults in their lives. They need us as parents to give them the tools and show them how to use them to become a productive, successful adult. As parents we need to be watchful of the behavior of our children and be open and honest about the dangers of drug use and abuse. Drug abuse is using any medication unnecessarily or differently from the directions given with the medication. It is important that youth understand that we are truthful and know what we are talking about. Sit down with your children and research the facts together. They will know they can trust what you say and won't think you are just being a controlling parent. Doing nothing is simply unacceptable. When parents are not part of the solution, they become part of the problem.

## Youth Event Calendar



***Mondays at 5:30-7:00pm  
at the Laporte School in  
the FACS room.***

***Tuesdays at 4:00-5:30 pm  
at the HAPA office in the  
old Utke Hardware  
Building***

***Alternative Highs***

***TBA***

