



Reaching Out

Norristown Area Communities That Care for Youth

Keeping Youth Safe & Drug Free

Spring 2010



Spotlight on Teen Drinking

Learn about Enhanced Police Enforcement

Tighter enforcement of night time curfew in Norristown will take place throughout the summer, as well as tighter enforcement of the underage drinking laws by all three local police departments. These tactics follow the recent research from the PA Youth Survey at the local high schools. This survey has found that **15 percent of Norristown youth have used marijuana in their lifetime, while 47 percent of Norristown youth have used alcohol in their lifetime.**

The average age of first time use for marijuana in our area is age 13. The most common age for first time experimentation with alcohol is age 12.

Seven percent of Norristown youth use marijuana on a regular basis, while 16 percent of Norristown youth drink alcohol on a regular basis.

Marijuana Facts You Should Know

By Alissa McBride, MSW, Community Prevention Coordinator

Marijuana is the most widely used drug among young people in our country and kids are smoking it at younger ages than ever before. The strength of marijuana has steadily increased over the last 20 years, and many of the additives placed in it are dangerous and addictive. It can lead to serious physical, social, learning and behavioral problems and has been the cause of numerous heartbreaking accidents and acts of violence.

Despite these facts, many kids think that marijuana is harmless. Television, movies and popular music reinforce this view making it seem as though using marijuana is "normal" or "no big deal." Some parents have mixed feelings about the dangers of this drug as well, feeling as though it is not as risky as many other drugs that their children could be experimenting with.

Moreover, current campaigns to legalize marijuana for medicinal purposes and, in some cases, decriminalize it in order to unclog

our overwhelmed court system are leading people to develop false perceptions.

It is important for parents and community members to know the facts, not the myths, surrounding marijuana so that we can send the right message to our kids about staying safe and drug free.



+ **FACT:** Marijuana is stronger than ever and can lead to a host of physical, mental health and behavioral problems at an important developmental stage of a young person's life. It can cause changes to the brain, problems with learning, and lung and respiratory damage.

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Marijuana Causes More Harm Than You Think

By Cassandra Iannetta, Life Skills Training Facilitator

“It’s only weed; it won’t do anything.” “It’s just their age.” “Kids are expected to experiment.” This kind of attitude should no longer be tolerated. It’s time that people understand the risks and consequences of their attitudes and behaviors.



What’s the big deal anyway?

Well, the big deal is that there are serious consequences of marijuana use. Many children seem to have the misguided perception that there are little-to-no health risks from smoking marijuana. However, this is quite the opposite. Research has shown that marijuana increases many health risks and consequences, such as:

- **Effects of Marijuana on the Brain:** Researchers have found that the THC in marijuana changes the way information gets into the brain. This is a component of the brain that is crucial for learning, memory, and emotion responses.
- **Effects of Marijuana on the Lungs:** Someone who smokes marijuana regularly may have many of the same respiratory problems that tobacco smokers have including daily cough and phlegm, symptoms of chronic bronchitis, and more frequent chest colds.

- **Effects of Marijuana on Learning and Social Behavior:** Studies have shown that marijuana use affects memory, judgment, and perception. Also, research has shown that young people who use marijuana below college-age level have lower achievement than those who do not use, engage in more delinquent behavior and aggressive acts, are more rebellious, have poorer relationships with parents, and more associations with delinquent and drug-using friends.

In addition to understanding the negative effects of marijuana use it is extremely important to be able to recognize if your child is using. Use the following suggestions to help identify whether your child is smoking marijuana:

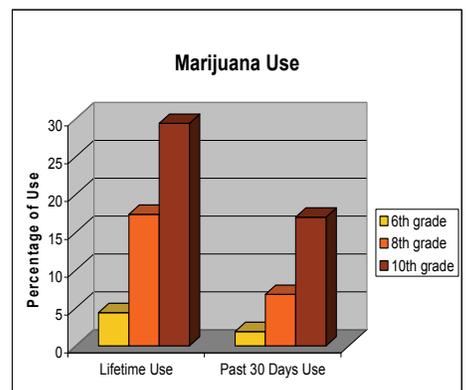
- **Marijuana** can cause excessive hunger, also known as the “munchies,” once it has been smoked.
- **Marijuana** use can cause excessive sleepiness.
- **Marijuana** use can also cause droopy and bloodshot eyes. Look for bottles of Visine or other eye drops.
- **Marijuana** use causes dry mouth, commonly known as “cotton mouth.” Notice if

they are drinking as if they cannot quench their thirst.

- **Marijuana** use causes people to laugh uncontrollably at things you might not find funny for a few minutes or over an hour.
- **Marijuana** can also cause confusion, lack of concentration, and non-participation.

If you notice any of these signs, this is the time to sit down with your child and ask them questions and listen. Inform them of the consequences of their choices and how it can affect their future. Open communication is the key to reducing this increase in marijuana use.

Without talking to our youth and explaining to them the consequences of their actions, these percentages are certain to increase in the coming years.



Source: PA Youth Survey

How Parents Can Prevent Teenage Drinking

By Alissa McBride, MSW, Community Prevention Coordinator

Being a parent brings much happiness and responsibility. While we love our children beyond measure, they can, at times, be frustrating. This is especially true during the teenage years, when young people naturally separate from their parents and push behavioral limits.

Underage alcohol use is one issue that many parents face during this time and it is a serious one. The US Department of Health and Human Services reports that by the time our youth reach eighth grade, nearly 50 percent of them have had at least one drink and over 20 percent report having been drunk. These numbers increase dramatically as they navigate their way through high school. Because underage alcohol use is more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined, it is important to recognize the risks and take steps to prevent your child from drinking.

As study after study supports the fact that parents are the most powerful tool in keeping children safe and alcohol free, it is helpful to keep the following tips in mind:

- **Communicate honestly and directly with your teenager about drinking.** Express



concerns and expectations when you are both calm and unguarded. Let them know the dangers involved in drinking; physically, behaviorally and legally. Set a clear family policy regarding drinking and let them know ahead of time what the consequences will be if it is violated. Make sure that you follow through with those consequences if a problem arises.

- **Be a good role model.** If you drink, make it a normal part of your life. Don't overdo it, or place too much emphasis on drinking. Don't let others drink and drive and certainly don't drink and drive yourself. Limit your teen's access to alcohol. If you have it in your home, know what you have and how much you have.

- **Know where your child is and who their friends are and network with other parents.** Being aware of whom your teen spends time with can help you become aware of potential problems. Don't allow your child to attend unsupervised parties, and follow up with parents of your teen's friends to make sure that they are telling you the truth about social activities.

- **Wait up and greet your teen when he/she returns home.** It is not enough to have rules, you must also monitor that your rules are being followed. When they are violated, make sure that the consequences you have put in place are enforced.
- **Get help if you need it.** If there has been a sudden, dramatic change in your teen's behavior that you think might be related to drinking, seek advice from a doctor, school guidance counselor or other professional immediately.

Parents are the single greatest determinant of their children's behavioral choices. Use that influence to keep them safe and alcohol free.

Who can find the time to keep up with their kids lives?

www.FindYour25thHour.org

Norristown Area
**Communities
That Care**



for Youth

KEEPING YOUTH
SAFE
&
DRUG FREE

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Communities That Care (CTC) is a risk-focused approach to reducing adolescent problem behaviors through community mobilization and planning. Local citizens and community leaders work together to identify the risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors developing, and enhance the protective factors that can shield youngsters from problems. The risk and protective factors are used to implement a comprehensive plan to step ahead of the problems with far-reaching and long-lasting solutions.

For more information, visit our website at
www.NorristownCTC.org.

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+ **FACT:** Marijuana use can lead to dependency and addiction. More kids enter treatment with a primary diagnosis for marijuana dependency each year than for all other illicit drugs combined.

+ **FACT:** Marijuana affects many of the skills you need to drive safely and complete other tasks and these effects can last up to four hours.

+ **FACT:** According to the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, teenagers age 12 to 17 who use marijuana weekly are nine times more likely than

non-users to experiment with other illegal drugs or alcohol, five times more likely to steal and nearly four times more likely to engage in violence.

+ **FACT:** Marijuana can impair judgment, causing users to do things they'll regret later.

+ **FACT: Parents are the most powerful influence on their children when it comes to drugs. Two thirds of youth say losing their parents' respect is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.**

“Make no mistake; marijuana is a harmful, addictive drug that is readily available to our children in communities across the country. Teenagers who are smoking marijuana today are using a drug more potent than what was available in the 1960s.” —Louis Z. Cooper, M.D., President, American Academy of Pediatrics