



### Teens and Alcohol: Start Prevention Efforts Early

Public health officials have been concerned about the high rate of alcohol use among American teenagers for many years. According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, three quarters of twelfth graders say they consume alcohol. These adolescents differ from previous generations, however, in one particularly dangerous way. In 1965, the average teenager took his or her first drink at age 17. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the average age at which today’s teen starts drinking is 14.

Consuming alcohol while the brain is still maturing can profoundly affect brain function, memory, and cognition. Researchers suspect some of this damage may be permanent. One study found a direct relationship between the amount of alcohol consumed over time and shrinking of the hippocampus, a brain structure crucial for memory. In addition, every year in the U.S., approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die in alcohol-related incidents.

A four-year study of preteens, conducted at Rutgers University, recently identified risk factors for “early-onset drinking.” The study, published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, found that children who were already experiencing psychological or behavioral problems at age 10 were more likely to become drinkers by age 14. Among the children without these problems, however, researchers identified the following four characteristics as predictors of early-onset drinking:

- ◆ Single parent head of household.
- ◆ Sipping or tasting alcohol before age 10.
- ◆ Parents who started drinking at an early age.
- ◆ Parental drinking frequency – children who witness heavy alcohol use are more likely to experiment with alcohol at a young age.



These findings indicate that parents dramatically affect the choices their children make regarding alcohol. Public health experts recommend that parents and teachers begin talking to students about the dangers of alcohol long before middle school. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism offers a Web site designed for middle school students which uses games and colorful graphics to deliver important information about resisting alcohol during adolescence. For more information, visit [www.thecoolspot.gov](http://www.thecoolspot.gov). Administrators seeking detailed information about the ways alcohol harms the brain will find a wealth of information at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh284/205-212.htm>. ■

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## DoD Pulls Athletic Supplements

Last year, two Army soldiers died after taking supplements containing an amphetamine-like substance called dimethylamylamine (DMAA). The Army has not determined whether DMAA played a role in their deaths, but while the investigation continues, the Defense Logistics Agency has prohibited vendors from selling over a dozen products with DMAA on military bases. These products, marketed under such names as “Muscle Napalm” and “Jack3d,” are still available in civilian stores.



Many athletes take supplements to increase their energy and enhance their performance on the field. The products containing DMAA, for example, are used as pre-workout boosters because they give users a surge of energy. Unlike drugs, the FDA does not test supplements; therefore, it is difficult for users to know which substances are safe to use. Some supplements, including DMAA, have been banned by the U.S. anti-doping agency.

The Mayo Clinic offers the following indicators that student athletes may be using performance enhancing supplements, such as anabolic steroids:

- ▶ Behavioral, emotional or psychological changes, particularly increased aggressiveness, changes in body build, including muscle growth, rapid weight gain, and upper body development.
- ▶ Increased acne and facial bloating.
- ▶ Needle marks in the buttocks or thighs.
- ▶ Enlarged breasts in boys or smaller breasts in girls.

Coaches, teachers, and administrators can remind students to make choices that are both ethical and healthy about supplements and performance enhancing products. The World Anti-Doping Agency offers a prevention program which contains a series of activities and ideas that can be used to educate young people about the issues and risks associated with doping. For more information about how to help student athletes make healthy choices, contact [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

## Cinnamon Challenge Alert

School administrators can use the “Cinnamon Challenge” trend as a teaching opportunity to emphasize the importance of exercising judgment before posting content online. This fad consists of attempting to swallow a spoonful of cinnamon without water. The spice immediately absorbs saliva and constricts the esophagus so it is almost impossible to eat plain cinnamon.

As students spit out the cinnamon, they often produce a cloud of fine particles that are then inhaled and produce an intense pain in the nostrils and chest. No students have died, but students with health conditions such as asthma or other respiratory diseases could be at risk for complications.

Since January 2012, the fad has “gone viral” and more than 5,000 videos depicting students attempting to eat the cinnamon have been posted on sites such as YouTube and others. To help students consider the long term affects of these Internet postings, administrators could point out that 50 percent of employers now research job applicants on the Internet prior to scheduling interviews, and 38 percent admit to eliminating candidates based on evidence of behavior found online. ■

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## Converting Personal Conflict to Growth Opportunities

Despite its potential harm, conflict is a natural human process and a part of life. We all experience conflicts at home, at work, in school, and on the street. Teaching students conflict management skills enhances school security and decreases classroom interruptions by giving students the skills they need to resolve conflicts themselves. Studies have consistently shown that teaching conflict management techniques decreases school violence, contributes to classroom management, and enhances students' social and emotional development.



According to the National Crime Prevention Council, learning to resolve conflicts can help students understand what they feel and why they feel that way. Students can learn to recognize another's perspective, hone their listening skills, communicate their needs, and state their position in a way that is understood and assertive.

One model that teachers can use to help students learn to manage conflict during the school day and beyond is the problem-solving model. The first step is to explain to students that when there is a conflict, there is a problem and it helps to have a way to think about the problem to solve it. The National Crime Prevention Council offers the following steps for managing conflict with problem solving strategies:

- ◆ **Stop, look, and listen.** Help students calm down, think about the conflict, and prepare to actively listen to the other person. How effectively students listen to each other is as important as how effectively they each express themselves.
- ◆ **Define the problem.** Teach students to use “I” statements to describe the problem and their feelings. It may seem to students that their feelings are obvious to others, but this is not always the case. In addition, students may feel angry and resentful and not know why. Other times, a student feels the other person is not doing what he should, but the student is not certain what he or she wants from the other person. Defining the problem helps students understand their own feelings, thoughts, and expectations to better communicate them.
- ◆ **Brainstorm solutions.** Once the students understand the other's perspective, brainstorm possible solutions. Encourage students to offer numerous solutions. If everyone is going to feel satisfied with the solution, it helps if everyone has provided input.
- ◆ **Use judgment and choose the option both can agree on.** Once each student understands the other's perspective, it is time to agree on a solution to the conflict – a solution that both can live with. Sometimes a simple and obvious answer evolves when the conflict was based on a misunderstanding or lack of insight into the other person's point of view. In many cases, a simple apology resolves the conflict or an open discussion can bring students into a better understanding of each other.
- ◆ **Figure out how to carry out the solution.** Ensure students answer the key questions: Who? What? When? and Where? All parties to the conflict need to understand the solution and how to implement it. Congratulate students on their work finding a solution.
- ◆ **Agree on a check-in date.** Decide with students when to meet again to discuss their progress.

Learning to handle conflict can be a challenge, but properly managed conflict allows problems to be aired and is at the root of personal and social growth. More information on conflict resolution can be found in *Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings* at [www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles/160935.txt](http://www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles/160935.txt). ■

## How to Choose a Prevention Program: Insight from the U.S. Department of Education

Selecting prevention programs is not as easy as it might sound. Fortunately, school administrators considering which prevention programs to implement during the upcoming school year can benefit from a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education’s Planning and Evaluation Service (PES) that examined the types of prevention programs used in schools, how well they were implemented, and the resulting effects on problem behavior. In the report, *Wide Scope, Questionable Quality*, the researchers concluded that taking time to assess the greatest need in a school, then selecting a few prevention programs with evidence of effectiveness, usually had a greater impact on problem behavior than attempting to implement several programs with limited resources.

Based on a review of data from previous studies, surveys of 1,287 elementary, middle, and high schools, and intensive on-site research at 40 selected schools, the research team recommended the following guiding principles for including prevention programs in the school curriculum: conduct an assessment to determine the issues of highest priority, emphasize quality over quantity, and concentrate on program planning.

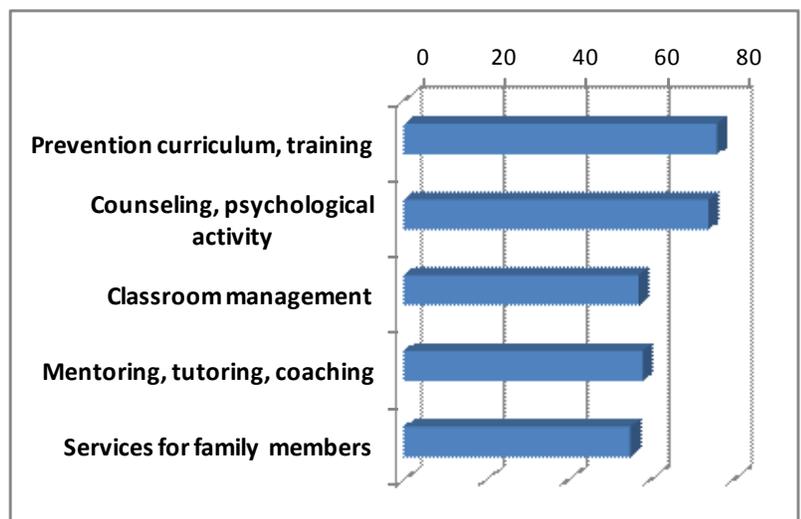
The study used multiple sources to collect data to establish what was considered “normal” to determine which prevention programs improved security. The researchers also established a metric named “orderliness” to measure classroom productivity. The study uncovered a wide range in the number of prevention programs used to teach students about topics such as communication skills, character education, drug prevention, conflict resolution, and anger management.

Increasing the number of prevention programs, however, did not make the school more peaceful. On the contrary, the team found that the more disorderly schools had more prevention programs. The schools with a more peaceful climate tended to pick one to four prevention programs and implement them well. The results indicated there were several keys to implementing prevention programs effectively:

- ▶ Ensure school-wide implementation – involve all students and staff members in the same program with age-appropriate modules taught in different grades.
- ▶ Provide sufficient orientation and training for staff in advance of the introduction of the program.
- ▶ Select a few programs and concentrate on implementing them well.

The team urged school administrators to: “Choose carefully among the activities to adopt, retain, or discard.” In addition, the researchers recommended conducting needs-based assessments to understand what types of programs would be most beneficial for a particular school. Only 40 percent of responding schools used formal surveys and only 38 percent based the decision of which prevention programs to select on published reports analyzing the effectiveness of the programs. Finally, the team recommended using baseline and comparison measures to determine the impact of the prevention programs that were implemented. For copies of the DoDEA Prevention Program Guides that describe prevention programs suitable for DoDEA schools, contact [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

Percentage of Schools Using Each Type of Program



## Coming Soon to a Pocket Near You: Healthy Apps on Smartphones

Research shows that 75 percent of teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 own a cell phone. While there are risks associated with the proliferation of information sharing technologies, not all technology is dangerous. In fact, the conveniences and increased social connectivity that come with using a mobile device can be harnessed for health and wellness through the use of some Smartphone or mobile applications.

### Apps for “Taking It One Day at a Time”

For those recovering from addiction, a mobile app, can provide handy reminders, social support, and a means of tracking cravings and victories. Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous offer several mobile apps. “Steps Away,” for example, uses the phone’s GPS locator to direct people to the nearest Twelve-Step meeting. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has developed a smoking cessation mobile app for teenagers. “SmokefreeTXT” is a text message service that provides encouragement, advice, and tips to teens trying to quit smoking. A companion app, “QuitSTART,” delivers mood management tips, helps teens track cravings, and monitors progress in giving up tobacco. Other organizations offer sobriety calculators that can help individuals track (and celebrate) their hours, days, and months of recovery.



### Support is Always Near with Suicide Prevention Apps

People who feel suicidal often report that they feel isolated and lonely. Smartphones can, in the short term, provide some relief to those situations by allowing individuals to connect with peers, share knowledge, and in some cases, receive support from trained behavioral health providers. Students in Massachusetts can take advantage of a suicide prevention app created by the Samaritans, a confidential emotional support service. “IM HEAR” offers teen-to-teen online messaging, a format that delivers the benefits of the Samaritans’ crisis hotlines in a style teens seem to prefer. In Minnesota, a successful suicide prevention app launched by the Carlton County Public Health Staff receives about three texts per day from teens contemplating suicide. Previously the program offered a telephone hotline which received on average only three calls per month from teenagers. Both programs hope to expand if proven successful.

### Military Apps Keep Soldiers “Heard, Understood, and Acknowledged” (Hooah!)

There are several military-specific mobile apps available. The Tennessee National Guard, for instance, has launched the “Guard Your Buddy” suicide prevention Smartphone app. This app and its associated Web site includes information on suicide prevention and mental health, as well as a “get help now” button that instantly connects soldiers to a mental health clinician. While this mobile app is only available to National Guard members, a suicide prevention mobile app for military personnel called Operation Reach Out is available elsewhere. It offers phone numbers for local suicide telephone hotlines, inspirational videos, and links to resources for those who are trying to help a suicidal friend.

Most social networking Web sites feature mobile apps and several are also offering suicide prevention programs to users. In December, Dr. Regina Benjamin, Surgeon General of the United States, announced a partnership between the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the social networking site Facebook. This suicide prevention program enables users to flag and report suicidal comments made by their friends online. The person making the comment is then invited to take part in a confidential chat with the Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

There are, of course, some risks to these technologies. Sometimes the personal stories and advice shared online are not helpful to everyone. Mobile apps, like any other self-help tool, can be beneficial when used wisely, but should never replace the advice of a mental health care provider. For additional information contact [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

## Start Planning Now for National Dog Bite Prevention Week: May 20-26, 2012

Research shows that humans, especially children, benefit from contact with animals. Petting a dog has been shown to calm the nervous system and lower blood pressure. No less than five studies have shown that children exposed to pets early in life have a lower risk of asthma in adulthood. Despite these benefits, the risk of injuries and death from dog bites is real and unfortunately, often forgotten.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), three and a half million children are bitten by dogs each year. In 2010, there were 34 fatal dog attacks in the United States. Most of the victims were children and babies. To help raise awareness of the importance of teaching children how to behave around dogs, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the CDC offer two dog bite prevention programs, plus a selection of brochures, fact sheets, and media materials for use during National Dog Bite Prevention Week (May 20-26, 2012).

The CDC suggests the most important step for parents and teachers to take is to educate children about how to recognize the signs that a dog is feeling annoyed or threatened. Studies have found that the number-one dog bite prevention measure is education and many children do not understand that when a dog licks its lips, growls, or backs away, it may be ready to bite or nip.

Children who understand how to act around dogs, how to treat dogs with kindness and respect, when to leave dogs alone, and how to properly approach a strange dog are much less likely to be bitten. While there are a number of booklets and brochures that older children can read, two prevention programs are available for pre-literate children. Most research indicates that this is the age when teaching dog safety is the most beneficial as young children are far more likely to be bitten.

American Humane KIDS: Kids Interacting with Dogs Safely is a dog bite prevention program created specifically for children aged four to seven. This program is modeled on character education programs and, according to program materials, “uses children’s natural affection for pets to foster empathy, which in turn will teach children to avoid potentially dangerous situations.”

In addition, The Blue Dog, a colorful cartoon dog bite prevention program developed in Britain, teaches toddlers and preschoolers about dog safety. The Blue Dog comes with a video and parent guide and is available through the AVMA. The AVMA also offers a guide for communities creating dog bite prevention policies: *A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention*.

The most important consideration to keeping children safe from dog bites is to supervise them around dogs. Eighty-eight percent of fatal dog attacks among two-year-olds occurred when the child was left unsupervised. By the same token, dogs should not be left unsupervised. One study found that regardless of breed, the one factor that increased the likelihood a dog would bite was whether or not it was chained and alone in a yard.

There are many ways schools can observe Dog Bite Prevention Week. For more information about reducing the risk of dog bites in children, fact sheets, and ideas for activities, visit [www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Dog-Bites/biteprevention.html](http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Dog-Bites/biteprevention.html). To request copies of the dog bite prevention programs mentioned above, contact [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■



*Prevention programs for young children who cannot yet read are available.*

