



DoDEA Online Radio Program Addresses Playground Safety

On the first three Tuesdays of every month, educators, parents, and community members around the world can tune in and interact directly with DoDEA leaders on School Talk, an Internet-based monthly radio forum for the DoDEA community. During the October 3, DDESS edition of School Talk, DoDEA Deputy Director Adrian Talley led a roundtable discussion about how to keep children safe on the playground.

Playgrounds provide important developmental opportunities for children as they exercise and interact socially. However, as Talley noted, student safety is always on the forefront of the minds of educators. “We take each and every injury that occurs in our schools seriously,” Talley noted. He continued, “Our guiding principal is that any injury is one too many, and we are focused on doing everything we can to prevent injury, increase awareness, and address safety concerns as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.”

Steve Hovanic, DDESS Chief of Staff, and Charlie Council, Principal of Irwin Intermediate School at Fort Bragg, also took part in the discussion. They answered questions submitted from the field and shared some “area-specific” information about playground safety, accident prevention, supervision, and ways to help students remain safe.



Talley pointed out that while school principals work with DoDEA and installation safety officials to keep students safe at recess, parents also play an important role in playground safety. During the discussion, Talley and Council drew on their experience as school administrators to suggest the following tips that can be shared with parents through the school newsletter or Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) meetings:

1. Keep school playgrounds clean when using them after school or on the weekends. Do not leave trash or animal waste on playgrounds or playing fields.
2. Talk to children at home about playground safety practices. For example, they should avoid rough housing, learn to take turns, and remember that rain and dew can make equipment slippery and dangerous.
3. Avoid dressing children in clothes that could catch on playground equipment.
4. Parents who see signs of wear and tear on equipment should contact the school principal.

For further tips on playground safety, visit www.dodea.edu/parents/playground.cfm. Tune in to this and other broadcasts of School Talk at www.blogtalkradio.com/dodea. ■

Inside This Issue

News & Updates

DoDEA Online Radio Program Addresses Playground Safety.....	1
Coming in January: Drug Facts Week.....	2
FDA Consumer Warning: Mercury Present in Some Cosmetics.....	2

Safe Schools Planning

We Need to Talk . . . Communication Vital to Psychological Recovery Plan	3
--	---

Education Issues

Parent Communication: At Times Personal Is Best.....	4
--	---

Cybersecurity

Teaching Responsibility in a BYOD World.....	5
Social Networking Trend: Blue Nail Polish	5

Prevention Programs

The “Family Checkup” Teaches Parents to Talk to Teens About Drugs.....	6
Help the VA Help Our Vets.....	6

Coming in January: Drug Facts Week

Help students explore factual information about the harmful effects of substance abuse. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, sponsors National Drug Facts Week, from January 28 to February 3, 2013, to teach teenagers the whole story behind many drug-related myths. Some of these facts include the following:

- ▶ Although the chances vary for each person, one in 11 marijuana users become addicted.
- ▶ Most people who start smoking as teenagers become regular smokers before age 18.
- ▶ More than four in 10 people who begin drinking before age 15 eventually become alcoholics.
- ▶ In 2007, prescription pain medications were involved in more overdose deaths than heroin and cocaine combined.

NIDA provides a step-by-step event toolkit which includes lists of suggested activities for increasing awareness of the risks associated with drug use. Many of the activities are designed to appeal to youth and tie in with winter social activities such as Super Bowl parties, talent shows, and Groundhog Day observances.

The centerpiece activity is a challenging Drug IQ test available at the Drug Facts Web site and for download as a printable PDF. Both teenagers and adults can take the quiz to test their knowledge of drug-related facts. As they answer questions online, students receive additional information such as how illicit substances affect the brain's reward system.

For individuals or groups taking the paper version of the quiz, NIDA provides a colorful booklet entitled "Drug

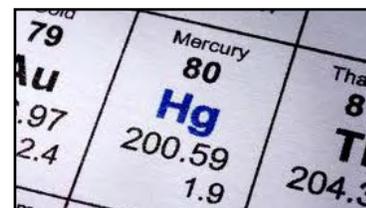
Facts: Shatter the Myths" which explains in question and answer format the science behind addiction. This booklet is also available for distribution to students at Drug Facts Week events and activities. The booklets are available at no cost and can be ordered at <http://drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/booklet.php>. ■

FDA Consumer Warning: Mercury Present in Some Cosmetics

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a consumer alert warning about cosmetics containing mercury. These products include acne-treatments and skin-lightening creams, some of which are being used by teenagers.

More than 35 mercury laden products have been discovered across seven U.S. states. Many of these cosmetics are produced outside the U.S. and, according to the FDA, are "sold in shops in Latino, Asian, African, or Middle Eastern neighborhoods and online." The FDA warns that consumers should watch for the following mercury-containing ingredients listed on the labels:

- ◆ Mercurous chloride
- ◆ Calomel
- ◆ Mercurie
- ◆ Mercury



Signs of mercury poisoning include neurological symptoms such as sensory impairment (blurred vision, hearing, or speech), pain, tingling, and lack of coordination. In other cases, the skin will turn red and begin peeling.

The FDA notes that anyone using these products should discontinue use and consult a health care professional. To learn more, visit www.fda.gov/downloads/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/UCM294876.pdf. ■

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We Need to Talk . . . Communication Vital to Psychological Recovery Plan

Providing emotional support to students in the wake of a crisis incident helps students resume learning and recover psychologically. Coordination between the school crisis management team and installation mental health professionals ensures all parties know where to go and what to do to reunite parents with children, provide immediate emotional support, and educate families about additional resources. Installation mental health officials and school psychologists can consider the points below when coordinating their plans for the psychological recovery phase of crisis management.



Including school counselors and school psychologists in the psychological recovery phase benefits everyone. These professionals have already established rapport with the students who are experiencing grief or emotional pain. School-based mental health professionals can tailor the emotional support based on familiarity with the psychological history of the student and the family.

On the other hand, mental health professionals from the installation offer an important resource to school mental health teams. In some types of incidents, the school counselors and psychologists may also be personally affected by the incident. Therefore, in the wake of a crisis event, these staff members may need time to process their own emotions before working with students. Mental health professionals from the installation, however, can respond quickly and operate objectively because they have “psychological distance.”

A partnership of this type begins with communication. Start by planning a meeting between the mental health professionals on the school crisis management team and the installation or hospital officials. Develop and/or discuss the psychological recovery response plan. Keep district officials and school administrators informed to ensure they are aware of the coordination efforts. Ensure school and installation mental health professionals understand how psychological recovery support will be offered. Establish simple objectives to make certain the discussion stays focused on the targeted outcome: ensuring the school and installation resources can work together to serve students and their families in the wake of a crisis. ■

Delegation Eases the Burden on Crisis Management Team

Since members of the school-level crisis management team, typically the principal (and assistant principal in a large school), school psychologist, counselor, nurse, secretary, and custodian/maintenance person must all juggle multiple responsibilities, it is easy for the team leader to take on too much of the planning and feel overwhelmed. Effective delegation can rebalance the burden.

The two critical aspects of effective delegation include matching the task to the person and planning “check-in” times to monitor progress. To ensure delegated actions are completed, keep a simple chart that lists each action, the person responsible, the date due, and a “check-in” date when the leader and team member will discuss the status. Sharing the work increases the probability that everyone will understand what should happen during a crisis incident. For a list of roles, duties and a time line for planning, see pages 17 through 22 of the *DoDEA Crisis Management Guide*: www.dodea.edu/Americas/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=101592. ■

Sample Delegation Checklist

Action	Person Responsible	Position	Check-in Date	Completion Date
Update contact lists	Alexander G. Bell	School Clerk	10 Dec 2012	11 Jan 2013
Restock Supply Kits	Clara Barton	School Nurse	14 Jan 2013	28 Jan 2013
Coordinate Drills	Smo Keybear	Asst Principal	29 Jan 2013	25 Feb 2013

Parent Communication: At Times Personal Is Best

Educators have recognized for years that parental involvement in a child's education enhances learning and contributes to a positive school climate. New research is showing that selective use of some types of electronic communication can enhance parental involvement when positive or neutral information is being shared. For complex issues and negative feedback, however, face-to-face communication is still recommended.



During a recent interview, Blair Thompson, Ph.D., discussed research that he and Joseph Mazer, Ph.D., published in the April 2012 *Communication Education* journal. The research team set out to develop a scale for measuring the use of electronic media in parent-teacher communication, but they also wound up charting success strategies for enhancing parental involvement.

The premise was simple. The researchers divided parent-teacher communication into five categories and systematically asked parents of elementary through high school students which type of communication they preferred and how frequently they communicated with teachers. Then they asked teachers the same question. The communication categories included: academic performance; classroom behavior; the child's academic and social preparation for school; hostile communication between peers; and health-related issues.

Initially, the researchers found what they expected — that parents and teachers knew the right way to communicate was to swap non-controversial details via e-mail, but save sensitive topics for face-to-face communication. Unfortunately, as the researchers probed deeper, and tested the initial answers with subsequent questions, they concluded that both teachers and parents actually relied on e-mail for all types of communication because it was more convenient.

“We still have a way to go to change behavior,” explained Dr. Thompson. He noted that there were two situations where the parties should cease communicating via e-mail and move to a higher level of communication. “If the message is obviously becoming confused, pick up the phone,” Dr. Thompson advised. Similarly, if the message concerned misbehavior, it was more productive to communicate that in an old-fashioned parent teacher meeting, rather than on e-mail.



Some of the research confirmed what they already knew: if a message concerned bad news, it sounded more negative on e-mail. Dr. Thompson suggested teachers could partially compensate for this effect by preceding the negative information with an observation about something the student is doing well, and conclude the message with an optimistic comment about working together for the student's success.

Educators can use both electronic communication and personal contact to work with parents to ensure the child's success. Use e-mail, listserves, and Websites to let parents know about positive news from the classroom. Meet face-to-face or call parents about misbehavior or problems. Weekly or bi-weekly updates to parents about classroom achievements enhance parental involvement, but require planning. ■

Teaching Responsibility in a “Bring Your Own Device” World

Personal electronic devices magnify not only the capabilities for learning and communication, but also the potential consequences of carelessness. Losing a paper note pad might cost a dollar, but losing a phone could cost hundreds of dollars to replace the device, and thousands of dollars to recuperate from the loss of information if personal or banking account information is compromised.

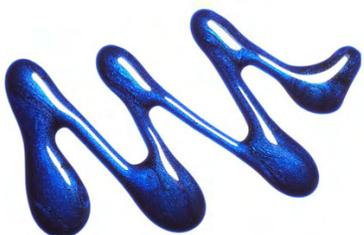
Fortunately, the solution hinges on the same time-tested lessons that have worked for decades: gradually allow students greater amounts of freedom as they demonstrate their ability to handle tasks and equipment responsibly. Educators can offer the tips below as a reminder to students about how to protect their personal electronic devices, particularly as students prepare to travel during the holidays.

- ▶ **Keep it with you** – Safe guarding a cell phone or portable electronic device requires keeping it on one’s person or locking it in a room-safe or secure area.
- ▶ **Limit content** – No one can steal what is not there. Limit information on the device to that needed during travel. Do not include passwords to bank accounts or other critical online accounts on portable devices.
- ▶ **Guard against “shoulder surfing”** – When out in public, be aware that sometimes strangers will attempt to collect passwords by surreptitiously looking over your shoulder or electronically collecting passwords used in a public wireless network (WiFi) location.
- ▶ **Turn devices off** – When not in use, turn devices off instead of leaving them in stand-by mode. This makes it harder for thieves or agents from foreign governments to obtain passwords and data.
- ▶ **Expect the interception** – What works in football also applies to personal electronic devices. Expect that third parties can intercept messages sent over portable devices. Encrypted messages can be decrypted.
- ▶ **Beware of cyber cafes** – Sometimes computers that allow Internet access for free in cyber cafes exist to collect passwords from unwary users who sign-on to check their e-mail.
- ▶ **Change passwords** – Upon returning home, change your passwords to limit penetration from thieves who might have learned your password.

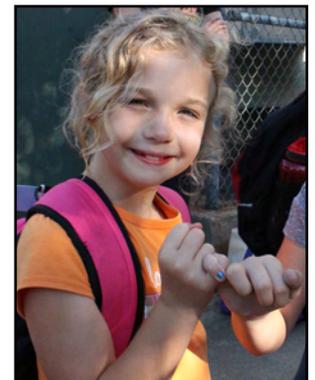
Finally, remember that some countries reserve the right to check electronic devices entering the country. They may scan the device and discover information that may lead to criminal and/or civil charges in their country. Travelers can check with the U.S. State Department for warnings regarding specific geographic areas at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html. ■

Social Networking Trend: Blue Finger Nails for Bullying Prevention

Administrators, teachers, and parents who have noticed teenagers sporting blue nail polish on their littlest finger can now rest easy. The trend, which has gained popularity recently in U.S. public schools, is not a sign of nefarious activity. Rather, teenagers wear blue pinky nails to show solidarity with friends or as a pledge for a good cause.



For example, one girl started painting her pinky fingernails blue as a personal reminder to stand up for bullying victims. When other girls asked about it, she used the opportunity to invite them to make a “pinky pledge” not to bully their peers. The trend spread via social networking sites and may be appearing soon on fingernails near you. For more information on ways students can respond proactively to bullying, contact safeschools@csc.com. ■



The “Family Checkup” Teaches Parents to Talk to Teens About Drugs

According to several studies funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), parents/sponsors with strong communication and listening skills can play a critical role in preventing teen drug use. In an effort to ensure that all parents have the communication skills necessary to conduct these sometimes difficult conversations with teenagers, NIDA has launched a new online resource: the Family Checkup: Positive Parenting Prevents Drug Abuse. The Family Checkup offers research-based skills that parents learn and adopt as they steer their children towards healthy life choices.



Good communication is the foundation of strong family relationships. Unfortunately not all adults have the patience and self-control needed to talk with teenagers about drug use, particularly if they are worried their teenager might be experimenting with illegal substances. The Family Checkup encourages parents to take four steps summarized in the acronym “CALM” to keep discussions with teenagers positive and productive:

- C: Control your thoughts and your actions.
- A: Assess and decide if you are too upset to continue.
- L: Leave the situation if you are feeling upset or angry.
- M: Make a plan to deal with the situation within 24 hours.

After mastering the CALM technique, parents learn other techniques such as how to tell the difference between encouragement and well-meaning discouragement. For example, reminding teens of past failures can discourage them, while letting them know their efforts are being noticed is a more positive approach.

Negotiation, supervision, and setting limits are also addressed in this resource. In addition, the Family Checkup emphasizes that parental involvement at school is one of the factors that decreases the likelihood that teens will abuse drugs. Administrators seeking resources to increase parental involvement at the high school level may also find The Family Checkup a helpful resource. For more information, visit www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup. ■

Help the VA Help Our Vets

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) wants to let America’s veterans know about the health support and wellness services available to them. Unfortunately, many veterans, including those still serving on active duty, are not aware of the numerous programs available to them.



The VHA is asking for the public to help in spreading the word about a range of services and resources that can help veterans maintain physical and mental wellbeing. The VHA encourages anyone who has regular contact with veterans of any age to print and distribute a flyer which lists 13 available resources for veterans. These resources include Internet addresses and telephone numbers for programs related to:

- ▶ Health benefits eligibility.
- ▶ Disease prevention and health education.
- ▶ Mental health care and social services.
- ▶ Treatment of post traumatic stress disorder.
- ▶ Substance abuse education and treatment.
- ▶ Veterans Crisis Line.
- ▶ Specialized health care for female veterans.

School administrators may want to distribute the list at Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) meetings, or add it to informational packets for parents. Student groups can use this unique request for help as part of a veteran’s service project. The list of resources can be printed from the following Website: www.va.gov/health/docs/Print_This_for_a_Vet.pdf. ■