



# SAFE Schools

## NEWSLETTER



### Women's History Month

"Women's Art, Women's Vision" is the theme of Women's History Month in March of 2008. This annual celebration allows schools to honor the contributions of the women who have shaped history. According to the National Women's History Project, "recognizing the achievements of women in all facets of life – science, community, government, literature, art, sports, medicine – has a huge impact on the development of self-respect and new opportunities for girls and young women." For ideas about how your school can use women's history month to inspire students to succeed, visit the National Women's History Project Web site at [www.nwhp.org](http://www.nwhp.org). ■

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### Recent Incidents Underscore Need for Security Awareness

The spring semester provides an opportune time to emphasize security awareness. A review of 55 highly publicized school shootings reported by the Associated Press since 1996 has found that the months with the most shooting incidents were March (18 percent), April (16 percent), and September (13 percent). These troubling figures were reinforced by the cluster of violent incidents which took place in U.S. schools during the second week of February 2008. Continued vigilance throughout the educational community is an essential component of maintaining safe schools.

Below are four suggestions administrators can use to ensure that security awareness remains high at their schools at this time of year:

- 1) During a staff meeting, re-emphasize your personal commitment to school security.
- 2) Check that the existing access control procedures are implemented faithfully (i.e., doors locked during the school day, visitors sign in at front office).
- 3) Publicize the referral procedure so that all faculty know how to bring students who appear troubled to the attention of the administrators and counselor.
- 4) Communicate to staff and parents/sponsors the mental health resources available to assist students and staff in working through challenging life situations.



Small steps can make a difference. A reminder at a staff meeting might prompt personnel to steer an unauthorized visitor to the main office, or to help a distraught student obtain needed assistance. For additional information, refer to *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide*, available on-line from the Department of Education at [www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/actguide/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/actguide/index.html). ■

## Actor's Death Raises Awareness of the Dangers of Mixing Prescription Drugs

The parents of actor Heath Ledger hope that the tragic death of their son will make others aware of the dangers of mixing prescription drugs. Ledger died January 22, 2008 in New York from an accidental overdose of prescription drugs. His father, Kim Ledger, released a statement to the press on February 7, 2008 in which he said, "While no medications were taken in excess, we learned today the combination of doctor-prescribed drugs proved lethal for our boy. Heath's accidental death serves as a caution to the hidden dangers of combining prescription medication, even at low dosage."



According to the official report released by the New York medical examiner, the cause of Ledger's death was a combination of six prescription drugs that should not have been taken together. Ledger "died as the result of acute intoxication from the combined effects of oxycodone, hydrocodone, diazepam, temazepam, alprazolam, and doxylamine."

The report also notes that none of these drugs – two sleep medications, two anti-anxiety drugs, and two narcotic painkillers – was taken in excess. However, when taken together, these drugs can be lethal, even if not taken in excess. In Ledger's case, the combination of drugs probably caused his central nervous system to slow down so much that his heart stopped beating and his lungs stopped breathing.

Many people are not aware of the dangers of prescription drug overdose. One study by the Drug Enforcement Agency found that forty percent of teens and an almost equal number of their parents think abusing prescription painkillers is safer than abusing "street" drugs. Yet, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, found that in 2004, almost 20,000 people in the United States died due to inadvertent drug overdoses and poisonings. That was a 68 percent increase from the 11,000 who died in 1999.

Concern for the rising trend of prescription drug abuse has led the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to participate in a \$30 million advertising campaign to raise awareness about the problem. Part of the focus of the campaign is to educate teachers about the signs of prescription drug abuse in their schools. The ONDCP campaign urges educators to look for the following warning signs:

- ◆ Pain reliever abuse: constricted pupils, nausea and vomiting, and respiratory depression.
- ◆ Stimulant abuse: anxiety and delusions, flushed skin, and chest pain with heart palpitations.
- ◆ Depressant abuse: slurred speech, dizziness, and respiratory depression.

For materials and information from ONDCP which may be helpful in educating students and families about the dangers of prescription drug abuse visit [www.medicampaign.org](http://www.medicampaign.org). For additional information on drug interactions visit the Food and Drug Administration at [www.fda.gov/Cder/consumerinfo/druginteractions.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Cder/consumerinfo/druginteractions.htm). ■

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The material herein is presented for informational purposes only and does not constitute official policy of the Department of Defense, nor does it constitute an endorsement of any programs by the Department of Defense Education Activity or the Department of Defense. All comments and questions should be directed to [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com).

## Exploring Different Cultures . . . Safely

For many DoDEA students, the opportunity to experience different cultures is one of the greatest benefits of living overseas or in different parts of the United States. As former DoDEA student Ed Griffin put it, “Few people realize how much you can immerse yourself in a culture when you are living overseas. I loved walking around the old cities, trying new foods like “currywurst,” and being able to talk to people I would never get to meet back home.”

Yet, when exploring a new location – whether it is a shopping mall in the United States or a tourist attraction overseas – it is crucial to stay cognizant of the need for personal security. According to the Pentagon Force Protection Agency’s Personal Security Guide, “Terrorism is a form of crime, and at the personal level, defenses against both are virtually identical.”

Keeping these basic personal security tips in mind when venturing abroad can help DoDEA students, staff and their families limit their vulnerability to terrorist attacks or criminal activity:

- ◆ Research the area you are visiting. Talk to your security officer or State Department officials for country specific information and travel advisories.
- ◆ Dress inconspicuously and avoid insignias that advertise you are a U.S. citizen.
- ◆ Learn some of the local language.
- ◆ Walk with a companion or in groups. Stay in well-lit areas.
- ◆ When traveling, dress casually; dress down where appropriate. Be aware of local customs.
- ◆ Keep your valuables in a secure area on your person. Make sure the openings of purses or fanny packs are located on your side or front to deter pick-pockets. Fasten backpacks securely. Keep wallets in the front pocket of trousers.
- ◆ Consider safe havens where you could seek protection. Police stations, government buildings, and banks usually have armed guards who could intervene to protect you.
- ◆ Occasionally thinking through how you would escape a hypothetical situation can improve your response during an actual incident.
- ◆ Notice your surroundings when walking down the street. “Street smart” means paying attention to others around you. Some U.S. personnel have successfully escaped terrorist attacks by noticing assailants following them in traffic and immediately taking action to avoid the area.



The State Department offers information on security conditions in foreign locations. Printed advisories are available on-line at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel\\_1744.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html). Additional information on personal security measures is available from:

- ◆ The DoDEA Office of Safety and Security at [www.dodea.edu/offices/safety/index.cfm](http://www.dodea.edu/offices/safety/index.cfm), or
- ◆ The DoD Antiterrorism Level I training on-line at [www.at-awareness.org](http://www.at-awareness.org) or <https://atlevel1.dtic.mil/at/>. ■

## Emergency Planning for Students with Diabetes

For some individuals with diabetes, the mental stress of a school emergency, or even a protective action drill, can pose a health hazard. Several studies have found that stress changes the blood sugar of a person with diabetes which can, if left untreated, lead to a life-threatening situation.

According to the American Diabetes Association, “diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin.” People with diabetes check their blood sugar, monitor their food intake, and often take medications to help regulate their blood sugar. Blood sugar that is too high or too low can cause serious, life-threatening conditions.

Planning and awareness can reduce the risk of a medical emergency for those with diabetes. Following are some things to keep in mind while implementing protective actions involving students with diabetic conditions:

- ◆ Designate a school staff member to assist individuals with diabetes during an emergency situation. Provide this staff member with training, as well as a reference list of symptoms and actions to take in an emergency.
- ◆ After the initial school emergency has stabilized, carefully monitor each diabetic, checking the individual’s blood sugar level if supplies are available.
- ◆ Keep supplies available for each diabetic, including extra water and a source for extra sugar (glucose tablets, tubes of frosting, etc.). One school nurse in DDESS identified every room her diabetic students were likely to enter and ensured that those rooms contained glucose tablets for use during an emergency.
- ◆ Be aware that delaying or missing a meal can become a life-threatening situation for a diabetic. Plan to provide nutrition for diabetic students as close to regular meal times as possible.



Not all diabetics respond to stress the same way. Some experience an increase in blood sugar (hyperglycemia), leading to thirst and dehydration. Providing extra water (or non-sugared beverages) is important for diabetics with high blood sugar. Others experience a drop in blood sugar (hypoglycemia) which must be treated differently. A person experiencing low blood sugar needs to receive sugar. Orange juice, soda, glucose tablets, or candy are effective short-term treatments for hypoglycemia.

While 14.6 million people in the United States have been diagnosed with diabetes, the American Diabetes Association estimates that an additional 6.2 million people are unaware that they have the disease. In cases of undiagnosed diabetes, it is important for teachers to be able to recognize the signs of low blood sugar. These include:

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| ◆ Sweating, chills, or cold sweats | ◆ Blurred vision                         |
| ◆ Irritability                     | ◆ Nausea                                 |
| ◆ Fast heartbeat                   | ◆ Tingling or numbness of lips or tongue |
| ◆ Light-headedness or dizziness    |  |

Careful planning can help protect the diabetic student during a school emergency. The American Diabetes Association offers resources for school management of diabetes at [www.diabetes.org/for-parents-and-kids/for-schools.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/for-parents-and-kids/for-schools.jsp). For information about how individuals can help a diabetic person during an emergency, go to [www.diabetes.org/uedocuments/ADAEmergencyMedicalAdvice.pdf](http://www.diabetes.org/uedocuments/ADAEmergencyMedicalAdvice.pdf). ■

## Best Practices for Safe Blogging

Web logs, or “blogs,” are on-line journals that are regularly updated. According to blog search engine Technorati, there are over 112 million blogs worldwide. Although many professional blogs are designed to keep readers informed of new trends pertaining to a specific topic such as politics or sports, most students are using these sites as personal on-line journals. In some cases, friends will create a blog which multiple users can access to create a forum for ongoing conversation or to connect with friends abroad. Teachers use blogs as a vehicle for assignments, making changes to course syllabi, or to create a platform for class discussion.

Unlike a Web site (which requires some technical savvy), bloggers can easily update their journals using on-line templates. A typical blog consists mostly of text, but can be imbedded with images and links to Web sites or other blogs. Entries are usually displayed in reverse chronological order, and levels of written formality vary by author.

Social networking Web sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, allow users to link blogs to their profiles by using “web feeds.” These feeds periodically check for updates and automatically revise pages when changes have been made.



Because updating a blog is so simple, bloggers can inadvertently publish too much personal information online. This creates a personal security risk. Many bloggers forget to take advantage of the “privacy” settings that Web sites such as Xanga, Blogspot, and Blogger offer. Following are tips which will enhance the security and safety of any blogger:

- ◆ Use the privacy and security settings that are available on each site to set limits on who can read your blog, and who can comment on it. Security settings could allow you to block readers from commenting on your blog entirely, or let you allow only certain users to comment.
- ◆ Do not tolerate offensive comments on your blog. “Flaming,” or any sort of insulting message, should be deleted immediately. Often, this sort of behavior is posted by “trolls,” or web users who intentionally post hostile or irrelevant messages. Immediately report any abuse of your blog.
- ◆ Disable the feature enabling viewers to use web feeds (some common formats are *RSS* or *Atom*) for personal blogs, which would allow readers to automatically post your updates to other sites.
- ◆ Disable search engines from being able to find your page and distribute it to the general public. This way, someone using a search engine to find information on “bicycles” will not find “Betty’s Bicycling Blog.”
- ◆ Do not “go offline” (meet in the real world) with someone you meet through blogging, and avoid posting unnecessary personal information on-line. That includes your last name, phone numbers, addresses, financial information, and where you live, work, or go to school.

The 2007 DoDEA Prevention Programs Guide provides resources on cyber security, including Netsmartz, an interactive, educational safety resource from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and i-SAFE, a non-profit foundation dedicated to internet safety education. For more information on cyber security practices, contact the Safe Schools Team at [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

## Embracing a Positive Model of Teenagers

Positive Youth Development is a theory of adolescent development that has been extensively studied over the past decade and is beginning to be more widely discussed outside of academic circles. Based on scientific theory and rigorous developmental research, Positive Youth Development rejects the stereotype that all teens are “difficult,” and instead seeks to build upon the positive qualities they possess.

By building teenagers’ confidence, character, social skills, and capacity for caring and empathy, proponents of the theory attempt to provide teens with positive models upon which to build their lives. Instead of focusing on preventing problems, Positive Youth Development strives to identify the conditions under which teens thrive. The Boys and Girls Clubs of America, National 4-H Council, and YMCA of the USA, for example, are national organizations that promote the Positive Youth Development approach through their local program affiliates.

Richard Lerner, Ph.D., directs the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University, and studies the benefits of Positive Youth Development. Studies conducted by Lerner and his colleagues, funded in part by the 4-H Council, have found that the teens who have a smooth transition to adulthood share five characteristics. Lerner calls them the Five Cs:

- ◆ Competence
- ◆ Confidence
- ◆ Connection
- ◆ Character
- ◆ Caring

“When all five are in place, a sixth ‘c’ emerges: contribution” adds Lerner who defines “contribution” as the “desire to give back to those people and institutions that give to us.” The goal of Positive Youth Development is to focus on ways to enhance the Five C’s in the general population of teenagers.



*Students at Brewster Middle School gathered 3,798 pounds of pet food for the humane society.*

According to Lerner, one of the most effective ways of teaching youth to contribute involves providing leadership opportunities for youth so that they can take ownership of the situations and institutions that affect their daily lives. He argues that many teens do not understand how they can contribute to society.

Numerous student leadership programs already exist within DoDEA to provide opportunities for youth to contribute to their communities and society:

- ◆ At Zama High School in Japan, students work with administrators to produce a monthly newsletter designed to enhance communication between the school and parents.
- ◆ At Heidelberg Middle School, in 2007, a team of four students invented a device to power depleted batteries in MP3 players using foot motion.
- ◆ At Camp Lejeune this year, Brewster Middle School students rallied together to collect 3,798 pounds of pet food and kitty litter for the Pender County Humane Society.

For more information on Positive Youth Development, visit the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth at <http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov>. For additional service learning ideas, contact [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■