



Teen Behavior, Through the Lens of a School Counselor

Normally, this newsletter contains information directly applicable to you in your role as an educator of students. However, there are times when you are also called upon to be educators of your students' parents. This article will allow you to give them a more clear understanding of the resources they have within your school. You may even gain a greater appreciation of your school counselor, too.

Teens have had access to illegal drugs and alcohol for decades. It's been glorified in movies, music lyrics and music videos, and many teens feel you have to do it to be accepted. However, teens are finding different ways to get high, one of which is prescription drug use. Prescription drug use continues to grow among teens across the country, and this may be in part due to the mindset behind taking prescription drugs: They are easy to get, free and because these drugs are FDA approved, they have to be safer than illegal street drugs.

So where do you begin? Where do you go if you suspect a child is using drugs and/or alcohol, or even prescription drugs? It has to start at school.

A child spends 7 to 8 hours at school, almost a third of their day, with school staff. These folks see and speak to students in the hallways, classrooms, cafeteria, clubs, sporting events and school activities.

School staff has the ability to see inconsistencies in performance or changes in behavior that may fly under the radar of a family member. In addition, changes in friends, personal appearance and/or personality may be more obvious to trained professionals who have been teaching, coaching or counseling a student three or four years and can speak to such discrepancies.

Schools typically have a triage system in place to assist students who may be veering off course. This triage system is set up so that coaches, teachers, cafeteria workers and administration can go to a central person to share concerns and get advice on how to handle a situation. This central person is the school counselor.

A school counselor is a master's level, certified professional trained in a variety of areas including individual and group counseling techniques, theories of counseling and drug/alcohol use.

Often times, school counselors become experts on certain trends that occur in their particular schools, such as self injurious behavior, bullying or drug abuse. And as new classes of students come each September, so do new issues.

School counselors stay on top of these issues, take part in professional



ZERO TOLERANCE – TOO STRICT OR NECESSARY?

BY: CATHY CARDEW MSW, LSW

For quite some time now, there has been debate about the zero tolerance policy school districts have adopted.

While there is no dispute that schools must do all that they can to ensure the safety of their learning environment, to what degree and through what methods is a point that remains in contention.

Currently, 79 percent of American schools have zero tolerance policies for violence and tobacco, 87 percent for alcohol, and 94 percent for weapons or firearms.

The zero tolerance policy details that regardless of the degree of the offence, circumstances, or student's history; any violation of this policy will be met with the same strict consequences.

A recent article in *US Today* told the story of a 14-year-old girl from Louisiana who was punished for offering a Midol pill to another student. The girl had no prior discipline issues but as a result of the offense, had to attend a six-week drug and alcohol awareness program and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. She was also forced to attend an alternative school for the rest of eighth and part of ninth grade.

This is just one example of thousands of students who are judged as harshly as more violent or regular offenders because of zero-tolerance policies.

The zero tolerance policy came about with the "Gun Free-School Act in 1994." This act "required states that received federal funds to mandate that local school districts expel students who bring a weapon to school for a minimum

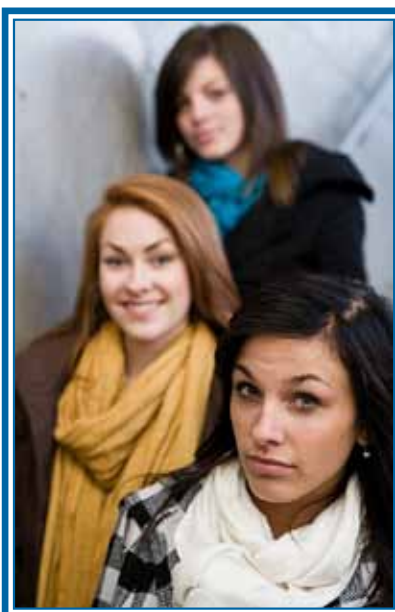
of one year."

From there school districts have developed their own zero tolerance policies on such issues as legal and illegal drug possession, violence, etc.

Some may say that although cases such as the one above often upset students, parents, and the community; they are necessary if a zero tolerance policy is to be followed through fairly creating a deterrent. Others feel that zero tolerance rules are applied blindly, too rigidly, and can do more harm than good.

Parents have said that they want their children to be safe at school, but rules must reflect that children make mistakes.

Fact is, zero tolerance and expulsion don't have to go hand in hand. Zero tolerance simply means all misbehavior will have some sanction. It doesn't mean you bring the maximum punishment for every transgression. What seems to be missing is the education component for both the students and their parents. Perhaps there needs to be a change in focus from punishment to education.



So the debate still continues about the controversial "zero tolerance" policy. Do you have an opinion? Please share it with us (mail@ncadd-middlesex.org)

Sources:

Join Together (2011): Critics of School Zero-Tolerance Policies Say Principals Need More Flexibility, the Partnership at Drugfree.org



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development opportunities and stay active with national and state school counseling organizations. School counselors have access to many resources that a parent may not have access to, and as a result, can steer a parent in the right direction to get the help they need. Programs are available in the community or in the school to help students struggling with drug/alcohol abuse, and school counselors can make connections, find financial assistance and help families throughout the entire process.

A school counselor is a first line of defense, a “go to” person and an “Oh my goodness, what should I do?” person. Parents should put their school counselor’s name and phone number on their refrigerator, in their wallet or in their cellular contact list, so that when in need of assistance, the contact information is readily available.

Where do you begin if you suspect drug/alcohol use in your child? Start at school with the school counselor. They are your sounding board, your beacon of hope, your resource connector and ultimately, your life line.

NCADD has included this article in our Parentally Speaking newsletter, and we ask you to pass it along to parents, as well.

The above is based on article written by Stephanie LoBiondo, MS, North Atlantic Region VP, American School Counselor Association. Ms. LoBiondo is a school counselor at Milford Senior High School, Milford, DE

NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. is a non-profit, community-based health organization serving Middlesex County. Our mission is to promote the health and well-being of individuals and communities of Middlesex County through the reduction or elimination of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use problems.

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