



“THEY ARE SAYING ON FACEBOOK I AM A LOSER. MAYBE I AM....”

BY LINDSAY RICH, MSW, LCSW

Imagine you are a teen. You are not sure about who you are, you don't quite fit in, and all you care about is that people like you. Now pretend someone in school posts on Facebook that you are a “loser” and you should just “kill yourself” because “you're so ugly.” How would that make you feel?

Unfortunately bullying is not just happening in the schoolyard and in the hallways anymore; with advances in technology, we've entered a world where cyberbullying is prevalent. Individuals are threatened, harassed,

embarrassed, or offended. This is often in public view, through the use of emails, cell phones, texting, social networks and more.

Cyberbullying effects children and can lead to physical, psychological and substance abuse problems. It affects not only the victims but perpetrators as well. Feelings of alienation and helplessness lead to low self-esteem, depression, truancy, drug use and in some cases, suicide. Parents often don't even know that their child is being cyberbullied. According to one survey, only 35% of teens who had

been cyberbullied told their parents, and 16% told no one. What we do know is that this is happening pervasively.

Education and raising awareness is key for prevention. At *PATHWAYS*, NCADD's school based youth services program, students learn about cyberbullying through discussion groups, individual counseling, and assemblies.

While explaining the dangers, *PATHWAYS* also helps students develop strategies to mitigate the risks and build confidence and resilience. Staff also educates students on the steps they should take with adults if they feel they are victims or bystanders of cyberbullying. Many students do not know that cyberbullying is a form of harassment and should be reported to parents, school administration, or even the police. As a result of



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the these education efforts, kids can come to *PATHWAYS* to receive guidance with regard to how to handle cyberbullying, and they know they are not alone, minimizing the potential for depression and isolation.

Parent education is also an essential component in prevention. It is important that parents are familiar with the following safety tips:

1. Keep your home computer in a public place so you can monitor your child's usage
2. Be familiar with your child's "buddy" list
3. Openly discuss the dangers of cyberbullying with your child
4. Stress that cyberbullying is not your child's fault and that you won't take away her computer privileges if she confides in you. Otherwise, she may choose simply not to tell you, which is the more dangerous option
5. Encourage your child to tell someone if he sees this happening to someone else. Bystanders can be a powerful source of prevention. And wouldn't you want someone to help your children?

Sources:

- *CyberbullyingPrevention.com* <http://www.cyberbullyingprevention.com/index.shtml>
- *National Crime Prevention Council* <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/cyberbullying>
- *Opinion Research Corporation*. "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids" (2006). www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingteen.pdf

Join NCADD's Underage Drinking Taskforce

Since 2003, the mission of the Middlesex County Coalition for Healthy Communities has been to reduce substance abuse, especially among youth. The coalition is always looking for new members, and there are many benefits of joining. At this time, the Coalition is seeking new members to join the Underage Drinking Taskforce.

Underage drinking is a serious public health issue, which is often minimized by the media, youth, and even parents. According to the Coalition's own survey of middle and high school students in Middlesex County. The average age of first use in New Jersey is 11 years old. Furthermore, nearly half (48.1%) of Middlesex County middle school students have used alcohol sometime in their lifetimes. Additionally, many underage drinkers obtain alcohol easily, usually from their parents, in their homes, or from other adults.

By joining the Taskforce, you can help spotlight this problem and help to change community norms regarding its acceptance. Your efforts can help to educate parents about how to talk to their children about alcohol use; to persuade local municipalities to pass ordinances which deter underage drinking; to work with local businesses to decrease marketing strategies to attract those under age 21; and to help promote friendly, alcohol-free places where teens can gather.

Remember, even a little time, coupled with a passion for prevention, can effect big change. For more information or to join, please contact Al-Karim Campbell, Preventionist I at NCADD at 732-254-3344 or via email al-karim@ncadd-middlesex.org.

School Has Started. It's Time to Practice

What You Preach!

Although such topics as the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs are emotionally charged, they are a natural and necessary part of the communicating process you have with your child. And no time is better than when a new school year starts.

Clearly, the best time for such a conversation is when your child brings up the topic. For most parents, however, it's not this easy and it may become your responsibility to raise the subject. You'll want to pick a time and a place that makes it possible for you and your child to be comfortable and undisturbed.

Remember that the purpose of this encounter is communication, so listen to everything your child has to say. Observe his or her nonverbal cues – they will let you know how he or she feels about having this conversation. Listening means paying special attention to what is said, both verbally and non-verbally.

Communicating with your child about drug use should not be a one-time occurrence or a one-way process. Conversations about tobacco, alcohol and other drugs are not like inoculations that can protect children for all time. Talk with your children often as they grown from preschool to adulthood.

Remember, prevention starts with parents. There are no guarantees that your child will not choose to use drugs, but as a parent, you can influence that decision.

Problem is that most parents usually live somewhere in between oblivion and constant worry over their kids. The older they get, the more this tends to increase. It's so easy for parents to beat themselves up or throw in the towel when their kid messes up or gets into trouble. You wonder where you went

wrong and how it could have been prevented. You ask yourself if you truly did set a good example for your kids. If not, where could you have made changes and is it too late?

The good news is, if your kids are still living at home it's never too late to set a good example for them. Even if they don't live at home, you can still set a good example!

It's a natural fact of life that humans learn by example. You can lecture your kids day in and day out, but what they really remember is your actions.

Do you tell them that smoking is bad, yet they see you puffing away? Maybe you preach to them about the virtues of reading or studying, yet you haven't picked up a book in years and spend most of your time watching TV. Perhaps you demand respect, yet don't offer much back in return – respect is earned! The old adage, "Practice what you preach" should be engraved upon the mind of every parent.

If you want to learn more about setting a good example for your children NCADD can help you with any drug-related information you may want. Call us today for information about brochures and videos available in our resource center.



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NEWS YOU SHOULD KNOW AND USE

ER Visits for Synthetic Marijuana on the Rise

An herb-and-chemical compound sold legally in the U.S. as incense is sending many of those who smoke it to the hospital. The compound, known as K2, interacts with brain receptors in a way that is said to be similar to marijuana. Unlike marijuana, not much is known about the chemical makeup of the compound.

Officials said more and more people who smoke the “synthetic marijuana” have reported to emergency rooms and poison-control centers with symptoms ranging from anxiety, hypertension, and vomiting to severe paranoia and hallucinations. U.S. poison-control centers received 13 calls related to K2 a year ago, while 766 cases have been reported in the first half of 2010.

The above report was provided by Join Together, a program of the Boston University School of Public Health and the nation’s leading provider of information, strategic planning assistance, and leadership development for community-based efforts to advance effective alcohol and drug policy, prevention, and treatment. To learn more about this organization and to subscribe to their newsletters, please go to the Join Together website at www.jointogether.org.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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