



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
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September 16, 2009 – A Home Run for Positive Role Models

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In college towns across America, vast numbers of college students are returning to campus for the new school year to study and work. As university students, however, we sometimes we forget that in these towns reside students in high school. Naturally, younger teens aspire to look, act, and be older. This begins at a young age when children put on their mothers' make-up and high-heel shoes and wear their fathers' sports coats and ties. It continues as children become older and start looking toward college students in their community as role models.

Many high school students have friends who are in college which can be an enriching experience for both parties. In this area, about half of students graduating from high school go on to attend Penn State. Teens who were classmates in high school continue those relationships with friends who are now in college. At the same time, they meet and mingle with older Penn State students through these mutual acquaintances.

Important lessons can be learned when students of all ages come together. Unfortunately, there are times when youth who are still in high school observe and experience the "high life" of college students in inappropriate ways and settings which can be very dangerous for both parties.

The Pennsylvania State University at University Park has been named the #1 Party School according to Princeton Review. Too often this celebratory atmosphere goes beyond the campus boundaries and influences local youth. When around college students, many high school students often strive to fit in with the older crowd. Sometimes, these high-schoolers engage in risky behaviors, such as under-age alcohol consumption.

Young minds are susceptible to influence by those in a crowd they wish to be a part of. Many college students are unaware how their behaviors are perceived by younger teens and how they can negatively affect adolescent behavior in both school, community, and home settings. As the number of students entering and transferring to University Park increases, efforts to enhance positive role-modeling by college students for high school students should also be on the rise.

Those of us in the campus community need to endeavor to bring out the best in the high school students we have contact with and create more opportunities and better circumstances for these future scholars. It is critical that we, as university students who have the privilege of being a part of this community during our tenure at Penn State, provide a safe and sober setting when spending time with younger students. To make the most of such encounters, college students should get off the bench and run a base or two to ensure that youth growing up in our community see Penn State students as the positive role models that most of us are.

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