



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



ARTICLE 10 – MAY 19, 2008 – PREVENTION OF SUBSTANCE USE

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership: Centre County Communities That Care®. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County Communities That Care® serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region Communities That Care® serving the State College Area School District.

Teen substance abuse is a primary concern for most parents. Survey findings of Centre County students suggest this worry is not unfounded.

Perhaps it's not surprising that alcohol is the most commonly used substance by youth, but what's unnerving is the fact that the average age at which Centre County youth have their first drink is 12.6 years. That's the age of the typical seventh grader.

The second most commonly used substance is tobacco. About one in five high school seniors report having smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days. According to researchers, past 30-day usage of any substance can be an indicator of regular use. In contrast, survey items which evaluate lifetime usage with questions such as "Have you ever smoked?" are more likely to indicate experimental use.

Marijuana use is less common but still impacts too many of our youth. Nearly 13% of seniors report past 30-day use. Again this finding suggests regular use rather than experimentation.

Use of "harder" drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, is much less common with past 30-day use generally less than 2% for all grades. However, inhalant use rises to about 10% among 8th and 10th graders, which is higher than state and national averages. Youth don't realize is that even a single "sniffing" session of an ordinary household product like hairspray can cause lasting damage or death.

While these findings are alarming, trends over the past five years are in the right direction. Levels of past-30-day use of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana dropped between 2000 and 2005. This information is from the Pennsylvania Youth Surveys, which each of the Centre County school districts administers bi-annually with the support of the local *Communities That Care*® initiatives. Based on the survey findings, Care Partnership and Centre County *Communities That Care*® have implemented research-based programming that has been proven to address risk and protective factors impacting our community.

In an effort to prevent students from initiating or continuing substance use, most districts now offer the LifeSkills Training Program. The curriculum addresses social, psychological, cognitive, and attitudinal factors associated with the initiation of substance use. The program helps students to develop the ability to resist peer pressure and reduce their personal motivation to smoke, drink, and use drugs.

In Bellefonte, Bald Eagle, and Penns Valley, the Project Towards No Drug Abuse curriculum is offered. Students are educated on the consequences and misperceptions associated with substance use. In addition to increasing knowledge, it teaches communication, decision-making, and self-control skills that enable youth to cope with social pressure and resist substance use.

Last fall, Bellefonte and Bald Eagle began implementing Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills. The curriculum has been proven effective in helping students improve academic performance, manage emotional distress, and decrease substance use.

Survey data suggests that the prevention efforts of the many parents, educators, and community leaders involved in *Communities That Care*® and our communities is working. If you would like to join these efforts, visit: www.centrecares.org.

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