



Extra Precautions

The holiday season is upon us and it is a time of celebration with friends and family. It is important to use forethought when thinking about all of the people who will be coming and going at your home for holiday parties and get-togethers. When opening your home to loved ones, always remember to keep the holiday celebrations safe as it could be an entrée to the use of prescription pain medications. We are in the midst of an opioid epidemic, which means we need to be safe and protect those who live in and/or are visiting your home.

When having a house full of people, it can be hectic keeping track of where everyone is at all times. Guests may end up using the bathrooms in your house. This could lead to tendency for guests to check out and have access to medicine cabinets, which could be the first step to opioid misuse or addiction. The best gift you can give to loved ones this holiday season is making sure to secure the medications that are easily accessible.

How to Spot Holiday Stress in Our Youth

With Thanksgiving complete, we mark the time of year that can be most stressful – the winter holiday season! Regardless of how or where you celebrate the holidays associated with the winter months, stress can be felt. From trying to find a parking place, to ensuring you were charged the correct sale amount for an item, adults feel the pinch of the holiday season and often struggle to keep their feelings, emotions, actions and words under wraps so not to create unnecessary stress for others.

But the types of stress that were just described often apply only to adults. What about youth? Children don't feel the stress of the holidays, right? With dreams of cookies, snowmen, presents and snow days what could possibly cause stress for youth during the holidays? Plenty! As adults, we probably don't even recognize the warning signs that the youth we interact with may be exhibiting signs of holiday anxiety.

Here are some types of behavior that may indicate holiday stress:

- Tear and cry for seemingly minor reasons
- Bite nails, twirl hair or show other nervous behaviors
- Express complaints about physical problems including stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- Withdrawal from normal school friends
- Any other behavior the youth doesn't normally exhibit

If you notice a student exhibiting these behaviors in your classroom/school, it's important to check in with that student to see if the issue can be resolved at school or if a parent needs to be notified.

Supporting Our Students

By Trevor Muir

One year during the weeks leading up to the winter break, I asked my students to write about what they planned to do during their time off. Most wrote things like, “see my cousins,” “get a new gaming system,” and “go skiing.” However, one of my students turned in a blank piece of paper with just his name on it. When I asked him why he didn’t write anything, he reluctantly told me that he wasn’t excited for the break. He said all winter break meant to him was two weeks at home alone while his mother was passed out on the couch. No tree. No family dinners. Not even any presents.

It was in this moment that I realized not all students look forward to these extended breaks from school. While most kids (and teachers!) flee from school gleefully on the last day, many students like this one dread the break from school. They miss the structure of the school day, the stability of the classroom, the presence of friends, the food in the cafeteria, and the love their teachers give them.

Although we cannot change our students’ home circumstances, there are ways teachers can help their students in the weeks leading up to and during the winter break. None of these ideas take a ton of time or money, but they may help ease the stress for some of your students.

Be aware of how you talk about winter break.

Of course you can and should talk about the holidays with your students and invest in their excitement. However, be sensitive about what you say. Asking questions to the whole class like, “Who’s excited for break?” and “What are you going to get for Christmas/Hanukkah?” doesn’t apply to all students. Maybe instead ask, “What are your plans for the break?” or even challenge them with, “What is one way you can help someone in the next couple of weeks?”

Be a listening ear.

This time of year, more than any other, is when students in my class act out the most. For some it’s end-of-semester restlessness, but for others it is anxiety over the upcoming break. As teachers, we can pay close attention to behavior that is out of character and check in with those students individually. Have a conversation with that student who is more hyper than usual. Ask that student who keeps falling asleep how they’re really doing. Give those kids a chance to vent and then let them know you care about them. One of the best things teachers can do for their students during this season (and all other times of the year) is listen.

Connect students with resources whenever possible.

There are so many coat, toy, and food drives happening during the holiday season, but students may need someone to connect them with these efforts. If you’re concerned about a student’s food security or lack of winter gear or presents, speak with your school’s guidance counselor about opportunities that might already be happening in your school or community. Avoid giving students individual gifts, even if it’s a well-intended winter coat, without speaking to school administrators and the student’s family first.

Give students an opportunity to serve.

No matter what one’s circumstances are, everyone has the ability to serve others. And for most, the act of giving brings joy in return. How can your class serve together this holiday season? Could you perform acts of kindness for one another or write thank-you letters to military members stationed overseas? One of the best ways to participate in the holidays is through service, and teachers can orchestrate these opportunities for all of their students.

Connect with students in little ways over the break.

Once you identify students who are dreading the holiday, write down their names and make a point to check in with them over the break. Shoot a quick email to them sometime during the week, letting them know that they are on your mind. It does not have to be lengthy, just a personal message reminding them that they are important to you. The message that you care enough to connect with them during your time off will have more power than you know.

Enjoy this season and all the festivities that come with it. Just keep in mind that you have many students who will not, and you, as their teacher, have a special opportunity to meet them where they are.

Give the Gift of Knowledge

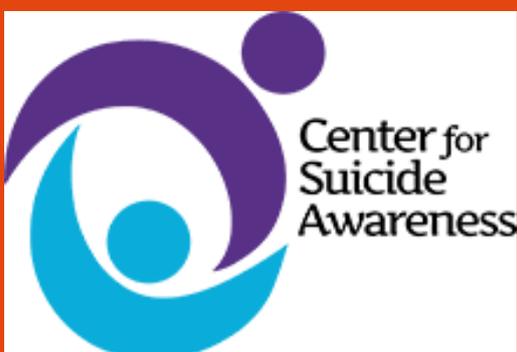
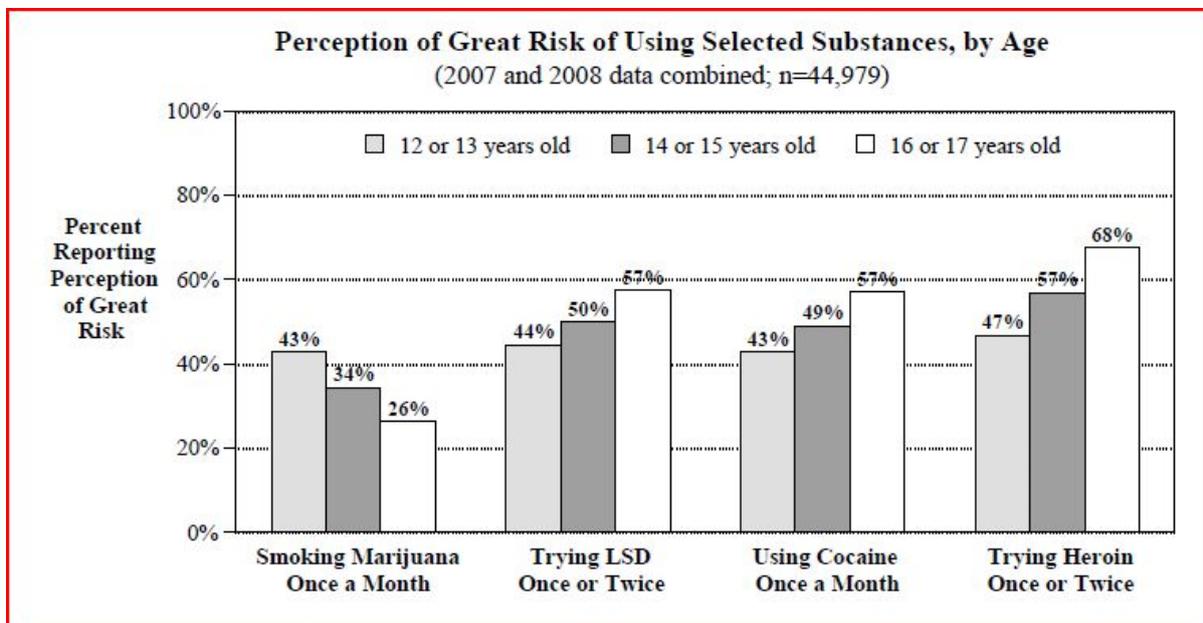
The holidays mean that teens will be out of school and, for many of them, a lack of supervision. Adolescent drug abuse is not going away, and parents would like to think they can trust the youth in their homes to abstain from such activities. But perceptions of risk may play a part in young minds, making them believe they are not doing anything harmful.

Many parents struggle to find positive activities for their teens during the holiday break from school. But even so, a lot of them are left seeking something to do with the idle time in between. And since boredom is a major reason given by teens for substance abuse, even the most trustworthy can be at risk.

Perception of risk is an important factor for teens who are faced with a decision of whether or not to use drugs for the first time. So parents should be aware of trends pertaining to the perception of risk for the age groups in their household. This is because perception varies due to both age, and the drug in question.

The graph below is from a report sent by the University of Maryland, College Park that shows variances in perception of risk by age group and the drugs marijuana, LSD, cocaine, and heroin. Parents can use this as a guide to discuss the real risk of drugs with adolescents at home. It is the best defense against teen drug abuse.

— Source: <http://www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/cesarfax/vol18/18-48.pdf> —



Struggling Student?
HOPELINE can help. Students can connect 24/7 with trained crisis counselors by texting "HOPELINE" to **741741**.

