

## Whitman/Pyle Drug and Alcohol Forum\*

April 8, 2014

Walt Whitman High School

**Moderators: Dr. Alan Goodwin, Principal, Walt Whitman High School; Mr. Christopher Nardi, Principal, Thomas W. Pyle Middle School**

**\*BE SURE TO SEE THE VIRTUAL HANDOUTS ON THE SCHOOL WEBSITE, UNDER WHITMAN HS QUICK LINKS, DRUG AND ALCOHOL RESOURCES. THESE COMPREHENSIVE SOURCES COVER VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND TIPS FOR PARENTS AND TEENS ABOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS.**

### **Speakers:**

***Dr. Anita Gadhia-Smith***

Psychotherapist and author, specializing in addiction, recovery and relationship issues

***Commander David Gillespie***

5<sup>th</sup> District, Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)

***Officer Jayme Derbyshire***

Alcohol Initiative Section, MCPD

***Officer Jeremy Smalley***

Alcohol Initiative Section, MCPD

The following is a compilation of the panelists' responses to questions posed by the principals and the audience.

### **General**

#### **What are trends you have noticed in drug/alcohol use?**

- The most common drug is alcohol (which is a drug), followed by marijuana (available in every County middle school and high school).
- According to Montgomery County data regarding people transported to the hospital after vehicle collisions, people under the age of 21 often have a higher blood alcohol concentration (BAC) than those 21 and older: the average BAC for people under age 21 was 0.23; for people age 21 and older, the average was 0.17. This mimics what is seen at parties with regard to juveniles with higher consumption.

- “Attention drinking” is a growing trend in which minors purposely drink heavily enough to require medical care, in order gain the attention of their peers.
- A trend related to marijuana is the use of “vaping pens” – THC, the active chemical in marijuana, can be extracted into a concentrate and put into the tip of the pens. The colorful pens resemble e-cigarettes. They come in different “flavors.”
- Heroin is a growing problem, with several deaths in our county over the last few years. It is very cheap and accessible and now can be snorted. Prescription drugs, particularly pain medications, are the gateway to heroin use. One out of every 12 high school students has tried heroin.
- Prescription drugs are also a major problem, although as heroin use has gone up, Oxytocin (a prescription pain medication) use has gone down. The decrease in prescription pain medication use is due in part to steps the industry has taken to reduce abuse: changes in dosage, access, and making pills non-crushable so they won’t be snorted. Heroin is significantly less expensive and easier to obtain than prescription pain medications.
- Molly is another popular drug, often used at concerts because teens believe it enhances the experience. Molly is a synthetic form of MDMA (Ecstasy); however, it does not necessarily contain MDMA. *See “Molly” section below for more information.*
- Sometimes kids take prescription drugs from home and throw them in bowls at parties, so that kids at the party can randomly select a pill to take, not knowing what they are consuming. Not knowing what the medication is is considered part of the excitement. These are often called “pharm” parties or “Skittles” parties.
- The Suburban Hospital Addiction Treatment Center reports that in 1980 the average age of a patient was 54; now, the average age is 16.
- At Whitman:
  - The major issues are drinking, marijuana, and taking prescription drugs, including stimulant drugs prescribed for ADHD (such as Ritalin, Adderall, etc.). Stimulants are often taken for test-taking purposes, to be able to stay up late getting work done, or in order to get high. Kids who have access to ADHD drugs at home may sell or give the medication to other kids.
  - Some kids, including those who get straight A’s, use alcohol and other drugs because feel they deserve/want/need to relax.

## **Parent/Teen Communications**

### **What kinds of discussions should parents and teens have about drug and alcohol use?**

- Make it safe for kids to talk, without condoning drug use. They actually want to have the conversation. The hallmarks of functional families are “talk, teach, trust”. It is especially important to start this when kids are younger.
- It is important to talk openly with kids (and honestly about your own past drug alcohol use and family history, if it is relevant). Parents need to recognize and get

help for themselves, too -- children who have a drug- and/or alcohol-addicted parent are 4X more likely to abuse substances.

- Prepare them for strong peer pressure to use alcohol and other drugs:
  - Role play with them, walking them through scenarios that help them make good decisions when the time comes.
  - Agree on a code with your child, which he can use if calling you to come pick him up from an uncomfortable or dangerous situation.
  - It is important to keep in mind that the brain's frontal lobe, where our decision-making skills reside, doesn't fully develop in people until about the age of 25.
  - To prepare for the future (i.e., college), come up with potential scenarios with your child, and brainstorm techniques for handling them.

**Do you have recommendations for parents as to setting limits for their teens regarding use of alcohol and other drugs? What kinds of consequences are recommended if a teen breaks the family rules re: substances?**

- Drinking under 21 is illegal. When something is illegal, there should be zero tolerance. Parents should expect that rules will be followed.
- Although setting limits is hard, consequences should have an impact (i.e., "cost" something to the teen), though not be excessively long and harsh. Early intervention is best.

**What advice do you have about children's friends?**

- Parents should get to know their children's friends, and their friends' parents.
- Parent should have the cell phone numbers of some of their teens' friends, and some of the friends' parents.
- Teens should be expected to communicate with their parents about where they will be (and if that changes while they are out), and with whom.

**What are the signs, symptoms, behaviors that indicate drug/alcohol use?**

- Parents should watch for changes in mood, personality, motivation patterns, appetite, grades, and friends. Apathy -- loss of interest and motivation in school and other activities -- is a major sign. Marijuana is often an apathy culprit.
- Signs of heroin use include constricted pupils, drifting off into sleep at odd times (this is referred to as "on the nod"), not eating.

**What should parents do if they suspect their teen is using regularly, or is addicted?**

- If a parent suspects abuse, breathalyzers, urinalysis kits, even hair sample kits (that can reveal an entire drug history) can be purchased at local pharmacies. An addiction specialist can help identify the extent of the problem, and if treatment is indicated, there are treatment programs specifically for teens.

**What should kids do if they are concerned that a friend needs help regarding drug and alcohol use?**

- Whitman and Pyle have the Student Assistance Program (SAP) -- students can anonymously indicate that they are concerned about a specific student, and counselors and other school staff will follow up. This program is not just for concerns about drug and alcohol use; it can be used for concerns such as depression and other issues. Forms for Whitman's SAP program are available in boxes outside of the Career Information Center (CIC), and between rooms A234 and A236, the computer lab and Writing Center. The form is also on the Whitman web site, under "Students Quick Links," on the "Students" page:  
<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/whitmanhs/students/assistance.aspx>.

**What should parents do when their children are invited to someone else's house for a party, a sleepover, or small gathering?**

- When kids are invited to someone's home, it is strongly recommended to talk to the "host" parents ahead of time, confirming that the parent/s will be home and will be carefully supervising. Sometimes parents are not aware of what is going on in their own homes. While it is always good to call the hosting parents, that is no guarantee that there won't be alcohol and other drugs present.
- Teens may "pre-game" before a gathering or a school event, which means they will use alcohol and/or other drugs before they arrive.
- Sometimes sleepovers can be red flags. Teens may arrange them in advance because they plan to use alcohol or other drugs when they get together, or they may ask to have a sleepover at the last minute, if they have been using substances while they were out.

**What should kids do if situations arise in which alcohol and/or other drugs are involved, and they feel uncomfortable and/or unsafe? What should parents do in response?**

- Parents should talk to their children in advance to make plans for what to do in such circumstances. Many families agree upon a "code" that children can use when calling their parents to come pick them up from a difficult situation, so that the child doesn't have to say in front of his peers what is bothering him, but the parents will understand their child needs assistance. Parents may want to have a close friend or relative who also knows of the code and have their child keep that person's cell number, in case the parents don't answer their phones.
- Parents may want to have an agreement with their children that they will come to pick them up no matter where the children are, or at what time, if a problem arises.

**How influential are parents' drinking and/or drug use habits on what their teens will do? What are some habits of which parents should be mindful and perhaps change, in light of this impact?**

- Most importantly, parents must model good behavior. For example, it is okay for parents to drink responsibly/in moderation in front of their kids. Acceptable "social drinking" can be modeled, i.e., for women, no more than 1 drink in a day; for men, no more than 2 drinks in a day.

- It is important to note that children who have a drug- and/or alcohol-addicted parent are 4X more likely to abuse substances. Parents need to recognize and get help for themselves, too. Keep in mind that addiction can skip generations, so history of family-member addictions from previous generations is important to know, too.

## **Marijuana**

### **How does marijuana affect the developing adolescent brain?**

- Long-term effects include actual changes in brain formation and a lower IQ, loss of motivation to compete/succeed, and resulting lower income potential over the long term.
- Use of drugs, including alcohol, can interrupt teens' psychological and emotional development.

### **What are some concerns about the recent legalization of marijuana in several states?**

- Increased impaired driving is a concern.
- Also of concern is that kids will assume that the risks of use and of abuse are minimal.

### **What are some troubling trends in how marijuana is used?**

- E-cigarettes and vaporizers are becoming increasingly popular for use with THC, the active ingredient in marijuana. These are difficult to detect because they are almost completely odorless. Also of concern is that because they use concentrated oils, they have higher levels of THC than smoking marijuana in more traditional ways.

### **What are some Maryland laws related to marijuana use in general?**

- Under newly-passed Maryland law, which goes into effect on October 1, 2014, 10 grams or less of marijuana will be a civil offense, not a criminal offense. A 1st violation fine will be \$100; 2<sup>nd</sup> violation fine will be \$250; 3<sup>rd</sup> violation fine will be \$500.

### **What are Maryland laws related to driving under the influence of marijuana?**

- The laws about driving under the influence of marijuana are the same as those for driving under the influence of alcohol and of other drugs (both illegal and legal).
- If police detect impaired driving, they will pull over the driver and conduct a battery of field sobriety tests. If the tests do not indicate the presence of alcohol, but the officer detects impairment that is inconsistent with the person's blood alcohol concentration, the driver will be taken to a police station and further evaluated by a Drug Recognition Expert.

### **What are the risks of driving while under the influence of marijuana, and do you know of studies that have shown these risks? Is it safer to drive after using marijuana than it is to drink and drive?**

- Teens have gotten the message about impaired driving related to alcohol use, but not necessarily about impairment from drug use. This is a major concern.
- Studies show that those 16-18 years old are more likely to test positive for drugs than alcohol.
- A 2007 roadside survey showed that 6.8% of Friday and Saturday evening drivers test positive for marijuana use. The numbers have only increased as time has passed.
- Studies have shown that reaction time, road tracking, weaving, steering wheel variability, and brake latency all increase with recent marijuana exposure.
- A recent Canadian study stated that drug involvement in driver fatalities (34.2%) is at least comparable to that of alcohol (39.1%).
- The odds ratio for crash-involved drivers with >5ng/mL THC in blood is 6.6; odds ratio for drivers with blood alcohol concentration 0.10-0.15 is 3.7.
- Marijuana use in conjunction with alcohol markedly increases the level of impairment.

## **Alcohol**

### **Where do kids get alcohol?**

- Kids get alcohol from their parents' supply at home, from older siblings (some siblings may be old enough to buy; others may use fake ID's), from adult strangers whom they ask to purchase it.

### **What are common methods/locations for kids to hide use from their parents (i.e., water bottles/in friend's bedroom, etc.)?**

- Among other methods, teens may use water bottles or other non-alcoholic beverage bottles to conceal alcohol.

### **What is "pre-gaming?"**

- Pre-gaming means using alcohol and/or other drugs before arriving somewhere (i.e., a party or a school event).

### **What are the consequences if a student comes to a school event having pre-gamed?**

- See the the Whitman Student and Parent Handbook, accessible from the school web site home page:  
<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/whitmanhs/news/index.aspx?id=321814>.

### **What are some risks of alcohol use, which kids may not think of?**

- Some common risks include sexual assault and other crimes – the risk of being a victim or of committing them; alcohol poisoning or choking on one's own vomit (which can be lethal); blacking out and behaving in ways a child may regret later.
- With cell phones, others may record these types of acts. There is no way to stop them from sharing recordings, and no way to delete them once shared. Children should be clearly reminded of this fact.

**Can you talk about the need to seek medical attention for a teen who seems to have gotten sick from alcohol and/or drugs, and the reasons their friends -- and even some adults -- are often unwilling to do so? What would happen if teens called 911 for help -- would they get citations from the police?**

- An important new Good Samaritan law will go into effect in October 2014. This Maryland law will protect against getting a citation if someone calls for help in a true medical emergency. The law is designed to encourage people to call 911, without fear of getting in trouble. However, the law is written to prevent its misuse for the sole purpose of avoiding getting in trouble -- any such calls must be made prior to police arriving at the location due to disturbance or other complaint. The law would also protect adults who have a minor in need of medical care, if the adults call 911 before police arrive at the scene for other reasons.

## **Parties**

**What should parents do when their children are invited to someone else's house for a party, a sleepover, or small gathering of friends?**

- When kids are invited to someone's home, it is strongly recommended to talk to the "host" parents ahead of time, confirming that the parent/s will be home and will be carefully supervising. Sometimes parents are not aware of what is going on in their own homes. While it is always good to call the hosting parents, that is no guarantee that there won't be alcohol and other drugs present.
- Parents should go to the door at drop-off and pick-up (instead of texting their children from the car at pick-up). They should make a point of meeting the host parents, and parents of other kids who are guests.
- Teens may "pre-game" before a gathering or a school event, which means they will use alcohol and/or other drugs before they arrive.
- Sometimes sleepovers can be red flags. Teens may arrange them in advance because they plan to use alcohol or other drugs when they get together, or they may ask to have a sleepover at the last minute, if they have been using substances while they were out.

**What should parents know before hosting their children's friends for a party or other gathering?**

- Please see virtual handouts -- *Montgomery County Keeping it Safe: Adult Host Responsibility*; *Keeping Youth Safe: Tips for Home Parties*; Whitman tip sheet, *Tips for Hosting a Safe Party* ([http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/schools/whitmanhs/counseling/\(17\)SafeParties.pdf](http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/schools/whitmanhs/counseling/(17)SafeParties.pdf)).
- Parents who are hosting parties need to be checking kids, what they bring into the home (bottles of "water" and other seemingly non-alcoholic drinks to which may

have substituted or added alcohol; backpacks and other bags, etc.) and closely monitoring what is being consumed.

- Hosts need to be aware of signs that guests may have “pre-gamed” – drunk alcohol and/or used other drugs before attending the party.

**Can you talk about the need to seek medical attention for a teen who seems to have gotten sick from alcohol and/or drugs, and the reasons their friends -- and even some adults -- are often unwilling to do so? What would happen if teens called 911 for help -- would they get citations from the police?**

- An important new Good Samaritan law will go into effect in October 2014. This Maryland law will protect against getting a citation if someone calls for help in a true medical emergency. The law is designed to encourage people to call 911, without fear of getting in trouble. However, the law is written to prevent its misuse for the sole purpose of avoiding getting in trouble -- any such calls must be made prior to police arriving at the location due to disturbance or other complaint. The law would also protect adults who have a minor in need of medical care, if the adults call 911 before police arrive at the scene for other reasons.

**What happens if police arrive at a party, and what are they trying to accomplish?**

- The officers gave examples of the kinds of things they find when they arrive at parties, such as kids passed out, vomiting, and needing medical attention. There are often other drugs present, in addition to alcohol. They often find that teens are videotaping or taking photos of others who are very drunk or high, either in compromising situations, or while ill, so that they can share it on social media. It is important to remind teens that these images remain available forever.
- The officers noted that police are trying to keep people safe, not trying to get them in trouble.
- The officers emphasized that they appreciate cooperation.
- Running away from police is implied guilt.
- While it is not required to let police into a home, if they have cause to believe they need to rescue someone from a crime (i.e., sexual assault) or a medical emergency, they will enter by force.
- If police do not gain access into a home, they will wait until teens leave the home after the party.

**Will they test for alcohol or drug use?**

- If alcohol is detected at the scene, they will test for alcohol use.
- There is currently no definitive test for drug use. Unless they find drugs on a person, they may not be able to charge him for using drugs. However, if drugs are present at the scene and no one in attendance claims ownership, everyone can be charged (this is more likely to happen in a vehicle or at a small gathering).

**What is a citation, and what happens when someone gets a citation?**

- A citation is issued when a minor is found to have used alcohol, a civil offense.

- Please see the virtual handout, The Juvenile Justice Process in Montgomery County.
- Multiple citations will result in further consequences.

**Can someone really get a citation, even if he hasn't been drinking?**

- Yes, it is possible for a minor to get cited when alcohol is present, even if they have not been drinking. This is called constructive possession.

**Some parents want to keep their kids "safe" by hosting an alcohol party at home; others feel it's ok to allow kids to drink, because they themselves drank as teenagers. What are the legal and other risks of these?**

- Please see virtual handouts -- *Montgomery County Keeping it Safe: Adult Host Responsibility*; *Keeping Youth Safe: Tips for Home Parties*; Whitman tip sheet, *Tips for Hosting a Safe Party* ([http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/schools/whitmanhs/counseling/\(17\)SafeParties.pdf](http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/schools/whitmanhs/counseling/(17)SafeParties.pdf)).
- Parents are liable for kids consuming alcohol on their property, even if it was brought without their knowledge. There are legal ramifications. It is a criminal offense and the fines are steep -- up to \$5,000 per teen in attendance. In Wheaton, one party resulted in \$370, 000 in fines.

**Prescription Medications, Including Pain and ADHD Meds**

**Why do kids use ADHD meds without a prescription?**

- Stimulants often taken for test-taking purposes, to be able to stay up late getting work done, or in order to get high. Kids who have access to ADHD drugs at home may sell or give the medication to other kids.

**How do they take ADHD medications?**

- Teens may crush and snort the meds, or they may swallow the pills.

**What are the risks to their health?**

- There are obvious risks in teens taking drugs not prescribed for them. ADHD and pain medications can be physically addicting. Also, there is the issue of the psychological need as well – for example kids feeling that they need a stimulant to perform well (and what that communicates about their feelings of self-confidence and mastery). With pain medications, once they become too hard to obtain and/or too expensive, teens may turn to heroin, which is readily available and inexpensive.

**What are the legal risks of obtaining/using these meds without a prescription?**

**What are the legal risks of a student selling or sharing his or her legally-prescribed**

### **meds to someone else?**

- The same laws that apply to the use and/or sale/distribution of illegal drugs apply to the unauthorized use and/or sale/distribution of prescription drugs. Many kids do not realize this.

### **What can parents do to help ensure that no one else gets access to their families' prescription medications?**

- Parents should check medicine cabinets frequently, and lock up medications, if needed. Among other things, it is important to check that the proper quantity of pills is in the bottle (to determine whether any have been removed for purposes of using or selling/giving to other kids).
- It is important to dispose of drugs that are no longer needed. For example, many families have unused portions of pain medication prescribed after having surgery, etc.

## **Molly**

### **What is Molly?**

- Molly is a synthetic drug. It is also known as a synthetic form of MDMA or Ecstasy.
- Kids often think it is "pure," but there is no way of knowing what is or is not in the drug, and other drugs are often mixed into Molly.

### **What are the risks of using Molly?**

- Dehydration through lots of physical activity in a hot environment (i.e., a concert) which coupled with the drug's ability to disrupt the body's temperature regulation, can cause dangerous overheating, can lead to serious heart and kidney problems (and death, in rare cases). The drug can be extremely dangerous in high doses or if taken in several smaller doses within a short time in order to keep the high. High levels of Molly in the body can increase the risk of seizures and prevent the heart from maintaining normal rhythms.
- Brain research suggests that the drug may affect neurons. The serotonin neurons used to communicate with each other is involved in controlling mood, aggression, sexual activity, sleep, and pain sensitivity. Research has also shown memory loss in people who regularly use Molly.