

This is an abbreviated version of the speech guide the speaker at the alcohol awareness presentation used. It contains valuable information for all parents. Please read and pass along to your friends.

This is our 3rd drugs and alcohol information session. The previous 2 focused on narcotics, over the counter drugs and prescription drugs. Alcohol is the #1 drug of choice for teens, and a gateway drug for other more serious drugs. If the national statistics project to PCHS then 750 students at PC have tried alcohol.

I am the parent of 1 PC grad and 2 current PC students. Six years ago, my freshman made a varsity sport team. Early in the season, a “team bonding” sleepover was suggested. Another mom of a Jr., who I knew casually, said she hoped the parents took away the car keys. Being naive, I thought it was to keep the kids from TPing or going to Meijer at 2:00 a.m.. Little did I know there was an entirely different reason. I would like to share some of what I and other parents have learned the last six years of high school at PC.

Underage drinking is reaching epidemic proportions world wide. It is no different in the Portage/Kalamazoo area. Students talk about getting drunk like they just went to the corner ice cream store. Reverend Edward A. Malloy, President Emeritus of Notre Dame, Board member, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, says “It is not just the behavior of the isolated abuser. Rather, it is the whole peer culture that validates and sustains such activity, which is a matter of profound concern.”

You can't distinguish from a group of students which ones are the drinkers or drug users. They fit every profile - male, female, preppie, athlete, drama student, gothic, KMSC student, musician, student government leader or church youth group member.

Often, it is the student you least expect who is the most devious. Kids usually are 2 years into an addiction before parents figure it out. By then it is time for rehab or jail. I would suggest you pay attention to the small stuff and never trust a teen 100%. The small stuff is what we usually miss because we are busy, and we want to trust our kids.

A recent survey found that high school students (age 14-18) reported that drugs and alcohol were available 54% of the time (72% as seniors). The parents of the same students thought that substances were available only 20% of the time. This is the type of discrepancy we would like to make you aware of. From an article in the Chicago Tribune, August 17, 2006. Joseph A. Califano, Chairman and President of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University says, "Parents are living in a fool's paradise, they've got to take the blinders off and pay attention."

From the same article

One reason for all the parental denial, say experts is that they often feel their offspring are protected by affluent lifestyles, extracurricular activities and impressive grade point averages. It is precisely this intelligence that makes kids adept at manipulation. They can and will spin things and make them happen the way they want.

David Cosby, a sophomore at New Trier High School says "So many parents have put so much effort into creating the perfect son or daughter, that they can't really believe when something goes wrong. They think, I've done everything and that image has become so solid that when something bad does happen, it's a shock." Parents really want to trust their kids.

Teens are smart and know many tricks. The child of a friend of mine says that parents know only about 10-20 % of what really goes on in teen world. After our first

drug and alcohol information meeting, parents commented to my husband that they were only aware of 20% of what was presented; they talked to their teens and found the teens were aware of almost 100%.

You should have received a handout with many statistics regarding alcohol. I may touch on few of them, but plan to focus on the difference between our high school days and now, the ways teens get alcohol and how they sometimes keep us in the dark. My intent is not to have you lock up your kids until they are 21, but to make you more aware of their world (or at least the 10-20% that I know about) One of my kids told me that if they came home every time they saw alcohol or drugs at a gathering, she'd always be home. She claims most of the time, kids are not pushed to drink but it is there if you want it. The problem arises when it is so prevalent that they feel left out of the "fun"

Alcohol is legal so it is looked upon as "only alcohol". The fact is that alcohol is a drug. I read that if alcohol were invented today, it would be available by prescription only. Many parents see teen drinking as a rite of passage. The problem with that attitude is that today is different from 30 years ago. Yes, teen drinking has been going on forever. The difference is that today's alcohol fits every taste. Just walk down the aisle at Meijer or look behind the counter at the corner store. There are cherry, vanilla, raspberry, mint, chocolate and coconut alcohols, Lite beer, flavored beer, lo carb beer and pre mixed black Russian or hard lemonade. Everything tastes good. It's not the cheap rot gut whiskey of 30 years ago. Flavor then was peppermint schnapps or Boonsfarm Apple wine. Watch the commercials on sports or teen channels. There are often 4-5 alcohol spots in every 30 minute segment. Everyone is glamorous, thin, popular, buff, and having

a great time. Watch Laguna Beach or the OC. Another example of acceptable teen drinking. Marketing agencies do not understand how to market to teenagers. There are no real images of what is supposed to be fun for teens so since each age group aspires to be the next older age group, our teens are bombarded with the ads focusing on young adults over age 21.

Drinking games have been around for years too. Taking a swig of beer every time “Bob” was said on the Bob Newhart Show is different than taking a swig of flavored vodka for whatever the trigger word is today. I don’t remember being able to go to Spencer Gifts or Barnes and Noble to purchase a drinking game. There is now acceptance and encouragement. Girls are particularly susceptible to drinking games because we have taught them they can do anything boys can do. The competitive nature in them puts them shot to shot against boys twice their weight. Who do you think will get drunk faster? Facts show that Alcohol is THE date rape drug. The possibility of accessing Rohypnol or GHB is slim compared to the availability of alcohol.

Teens in this area have no problem getting alcohol. We have 3 colleges within 15 minutes of PC. In the era of cell phones, IM’s, Facebook and My Space, a recent graduate or a current senior can hook them up in a short amount of time. At the middle school age, 70% of the alcohol they drink is taken from their own home. –sometimes vodka is replaced with water, sometimes they just take it. A neighbor’s garage fridge or a close friend or relative’s house is an easy target too. Most people don’t lock up or try to hide their alcohol. The old fashioned way, sometimes referred to as “hey mister” is just hanging out by the party store or Meijer and asking someone to buy for them. This works particularly well for cute girls asking 20-something boys.

Working with the police, the Portage Central Chapter of Youth in Action recently conducted a number of stings in the area. Many businesses and restaurants sold to the minors even though all of the students had vertical licenses. Police are talking to those businesses.

Where and how do they drink under our noses?

Sleepovers are extremely common and go undetected. The parents go to bed at some point. It can be 2 kids or a group of kids. A sleepover is the most common place for the “good kid, star athlete” to drink because they will most likely not get caught in a way that will get an athletic suspension. And the parents have complete trust that their child, the athlete, would never drink and risk getting caught.

Another sleepover trap is with kids who have known each other since 1st grade. You have trust that your child is safe at the other’s house. In upper grades when kids are driving themselves, your child says he’ll be at friend x, that friend tells his mom he’ll be at your house. You don’t check because they’ve been friends forever. They could be anywhere and with cell phones-they are still in contact. Also be aware of staying at Steve’s house-you’ve known him forever- but they’ll be at Steve’s South Haven or Gull Lake house, not the local house. Technically, your child didn’t lie to you-just omitted some information.

Another sleepover issue is that some parents feel it is okay to supply alcohol as long as they take the car keys away. The parents of the guests are not told, and the kids have slept off the alcohol before they go home and the parents of the guests never have a clue. Some kids keep an extra key in their pocket or in a magnetic box on their car. They

leave, driving under the influence and return to sleep at some point. Because they are asleep in the morning, no one would have a reason to question.

My recommendation – unless you search your house, search every bag that comes into your house and plan to stay up all night physically watching – don't allow sleepovers.

Here are some true story examples from Portage kids. These are things to be aware of, not take as “this is going to happen” stories. I intentionally have not used any names and have changed the sex of the individuals in many of the cases.

1. A freshman group of 7-8 kids. Mom and dad spoke with every kid who came in the door and they were all known students. Soon kids are throwing up. Alcohol was hidden in the window well ahead of time. Same story, different house, only alcohol was stashed days before in a closet. Another house, alcohol hidden in the dropped ceiling.
2. One student coming out of the basement frequently to make a cell call - no service in the basement (common excuse in Rudgate). Next day, found an empty vodka bottle in the bushes.
3. Small bonfire- 7 kids- parents knew all but one really well and would not have expected any of them to drink. The next day during clean-up, a water bottle that was not the brand supplied smelled of alcohol. Further sniffing indicated that the alcohol had been mixed with the cans of pop supplied.
4. Prom time is a popular time to drink. At one party last spring, the majority of the students had been drinking and at 1:00 am the parents came outside and said the kids were too loud and needed to go home. A bunch of kids got in their cars and

- drove away drunk. Fortunately the sober students did try to take as many kids as their cars could hold, although it was to another party.
5. At another Prom party, kids were puking drunk even though several parents of guests had been assured there would be no drinking at the house. The kids at the party claim they never saw a parent the whole night.
 6. At a Halloween Party a couple of years ago. The guest list was about 20 people. Each friend brought a couple friends and between 10:30 and 11 there were at least 100 kids. Cell phones continued to ring and a nightmare scene evolved. Even a car load from K Central. Kids were turned away and sent home. The next day, the alcohol (and drug) litter was everywhere.
 7. Students are drinking and driving. One girl made the comment in class last year just after a PC student was paralyzed from an alcohol related accident, that “everyone drinks and drives”. The comment was not received well by students around her, but the fact probably has some truth to it.
 8. Just this fall at a bonfire, students were drinking. Friends of one student didn’t think she should drive home and took the keys. An argument ensued and it was agreed that the sibling, who had taken both segments of drivers training but did not have a full license should drive. The older student agreed long enough to get a couple of blocks away where she then took over the wheel from her sibling. She did get caught by her parents.
 9. A boy who had been drinking had a friend drive most of the way home. The friend didn’t want to walk the mile between the houses, so the friend turned the car back over to him. This was in Woodbridge Hills, but could have been in

Colony Woods, Rudgate or the city of Portage. Under a mile doesn't matter if you or your child is the one who has a car cross the center line coming toward you.

10. Kids often have DD's set up. Some kids volunteer to be the DD because they now have an excuse and won't be pressured to drink. One issue with DD's is they often start at the park n ride on Centre. The drinking kids drive home from there. After all, Rudgate, Colony Woods and Woodbridge are close. Centre between 11:30 and 12:30 probably isn't the safest place for any of us to be. That particular park n ride is outside of the Marathon Convenience store(they do not sell beer or alcohol), where alcohol & drugs have in the past been exchanged. Kids are given free cups of ice for the asking to keep their drinks cold.

We have countless stories of small and big parties held at the home of students whose parents were out of town and trusted their kids. This applies to college age also. Some had damage, some didn't, but the number of known events is staggering. Damage ranged from red stains on white carpet and every bed slept in, to a "borrowed car" resulting in an accident. There was one of these no parent home parties on Sat. night. Several kids got caught after using the "I'll be at so and so's house. An away message tipped off one parent, some phone calls were made and the lies were discovered. Don't leave your kids home alone for the night. Your child may be Mother Theresa but the devil and his posse may be posing as friends to get into an unattended house.

I can tell you of 2 recent happenings where good friends of a student let themselves into a house for an unsupervised get together when the owners were not at home. Neither home had any damage, just a few things out of place so no one was prosecuted for breaking and entering, but it could have been a terrible situation. Lock up your houses

and remove the spare key when you will be gone. Tell your kids the importance of not sharing your key pad code. Kids who have an addiction and can get into an empty house don't care who they steal from, as long as they get their drugs of choice.

The signs of alcohol poisoning are on a hand out and on the "credit card" you received tonight. Talk to your children about this and ignore their ignorance if they balk. There are several Portage teens who are alive today because another student did call an adult or 911.

Some tips we have learned:

Be aware of kids who bring their own Big Gulp or 2 liter of pop.

Cargo pants, winter coats, big purses, backpacks and water bottles are hiding places.

If your child has had a change in friends and the lifelong buddy is no longer in the picture, one or the other could be experimenting in risky behavior.

Listen to the kids around you at sporting events-you may learn where a party is or what new liquors are being tried.

Listen to the kids in your carpool-they think you can't hear.

Talk about the consequence for alcohol behavior before it happens.

Keep a drug test kit and/or breathalyzer in the house and make sure the kids know you will use them if you feel necessary.

Check away messages.

- Bring a case or bottles to...
- Older sister at college had away message- my sister called me drunk at 2:30am guess where she was- a sleepover

Have your child show you his/her My Space or Facebook profile and click on the photos of some of their friends.

Follow your gut instincts. If your kid is going to sleep over somewhere and he calls to check in 30 min earlier than curfew, and is normally an 11:59 kid for a midnight curfew, or they call dad when they usually call mom for permission or check in, you might want to call the land line 20 min later or do a drive by to see if the car is there.

Do the kids always go to the same house week after week? It could be because they have big screen tv, playstation, game cube, pool table, heated pool, hot tub, etc. It could also mean there is no supervision. Ask the question.

If your child suddenly decides to do his own laundry on a Sat or Sun morning and has never done a load of wash, check it out, he may be washing the vomit out of his clothes. Just pay attention to the small differences in behavior, often kids are not good liars and you need to question any out of the ordinary activities.

Earlier I mentioned that alcohol is a gateway drug to harder drugs and usually parents don't know until 2-3 years into an addiction. I know the aunt of a Grandville student who died of a heroin overdose last year. I talked to her just last weekend and asked about the progression of her nephew's disease. He started with alcohol in middle or early high school and progressed to pot. Early on, missing beer from the house was blamed on a sibling 3 years older. Eventually he did 6 months in a rehab facility where he learned about more drugs. Even with his history, his parents did not know he had graduated to heroin. After his death, his room was given a thorough search. Needles, syringes and other paraphernalia was found behind the switch plate covers, taped to the

bottom of the dresser, behind heat registers and there was a hole cut into the wall behind the dresser. All places little more secretive than between the mattresses. It is rare for a child to start using any narcotic if they haven't already done the alcohol and pot. Several other families who have experienced addictions concur that in hindsight, there were gut feeling signs early on that were ignored.

Some more disturbing facts:

- Drinking under the age of 21 is illegal but for whatever reason, accepted. Six times more kids die from alcohol related deaths than all other drugs combined yet the federal government spends 25 times more on drug prevention.
- The number of teens who die each year on college campuses of alcohol poisoning is between 1,400-1,700.
- Binge drinking is having more than 5 drinks in one sitting.
- 47% of kids say the reason they drink is to get drunk.
- According to research, the reason kids drink: peer pressure and the status of drinking.
- A teen doesn't know the feeling of "too much" so they drink until their body shuts down. Alcohol poisoning deaths usually only happen to people under 25.
- Students polled, 49% would not call 911 if a friend passed out.
- The brains of girls are not developed until age 20-22
- The brains of boys are not fully developed until age 23-25.

- A teen can become an alcoholic in just 5-15 MONTHS because the brain is still developing.
- Just one episode of binge drinking can cause irreversible brain damage affecting memory & learning. The frontal lobe, the last region to mature, controls these functions.
- There is a Huge Hereditary link to alcoholism. If it is in your family, you need to talk to your child.
- Blood alcohol content continues to rise after the last drink. Anything over .3 can put a person in a coma.

A Blackout is not the same as passed out. Blackout is functioning, with or without the appearance of intoxication, but there is no recollection of the activities the next day. Blackouts often occur after rapid consumption (binge drinking) of alcohol. During this time, unprotected sex, drunk driving, theft, spending large amounts of money and other risky behavior takes place. More than ½ of college students and 20% of all teens have experienced a blackout.

Dates to be aware of where drinking activity seems to increase:

- End of marking periods in Oct and March. Usually have less homework and they coincide with the end of sports seasons.
- Halloween, New Years Eve, Anytime after spring break for seniors especially.
- Most seniors know what colleges they have been accepted to by Christmas so they feel they can slack off on the studying.

- The entire summer before college. No one wants to go to college never having been drunk. Sport consequences are done and the consequence of an MIP is easily erased from record for first offense.
- South Haven any sunny day all summer and especially the 4th of July fireworks day.
- Portage kids tend to have cars, money and no jobs. Easy to spend the day at the beach. Countless Portage students have received MIP's in South Haven. Remember-they have to drive home.

Talk to your kids. Tell them they can call you for a ride. Help them come up with ways to say no. Read the statistics and convey them to your child. Alcohol is illegal under the age of 21. It is not your choice to supply another child alcohol and you can be prosecuted for it. It is not a rite of passage that teens should be entitled to.

Since college is a blink away for all of you, some College insight.

- Students are arriving at college with alcohol problems already established – it used to be that college was where problems were developed.
- Most colleges take no responsibility for notifying parents of alcohol infractions
- Drinking games are common and deadly.
- A ring of bars and liquor stores surround most colleges. At one college, 185 outlets were within 2 miles of campus.
- My friend's child spent freshman year in an alcohol free dorm at UofM. MIP's were hung on doors as badges of honor. Recycle bins were filled with empty beer and alcohol containers. So much for alcohol free.

- On a 21st birthday, bars near campus promote “power hour”. How many shots can be done between midnight and last call.
- Hazing is still happening for sport teams.

As parents, we are the first line of defense in keeping our kids safe. We can't continue to blame the school, the convenience store clerk, or the kid who is a bad influence. For every example I gave tonight, there are many just like it. My network is not that wide. These are our children and we need to be paying attention.