

HELPING HAND

January, 2006

Volume 16, Issue 5

Secondhand Tobacco Smoke Is Particularly Harmful to Children's Health

Despite health warnings about the dangers of secondhand smoke, a large percentage of families have no rules that limit children's exposure to tobacco smoke. A study involving 1,770 parents and guardians in New York and New Jersey finds that, in nearly half of homes and more than half of family cars, children are exposed to secondhand smoke. The research also finds that many parents consistently make no effort to protect their children from secondhand smoke in public places. The findings are published in the spring 2005 issue of *Families, Systems & Health*, a journal published by the American Psychological Association (APA).

Researchers Sara Pyle, MA, and C. Keith Haddock, PhD, of the University of Missouri-Kansas City and colleagues approached parents and guardians at 15 pediatric residency-training programs in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area who were waiting for their child's pediatric appointment. The adults were asked to identify, from a list of possible rules, which family smoking restrictions were in place within their family. This included such rules as "Only adults can smoke," "Adults can smoke, but not around children," and "No smoking is allowed in my home." The researchers also inquired about tobacco exposure rules outside the home, including "Do not allow smoking in the car," "Ask people not to smoke in their presence," and "Usually sit in the no-smoking sections of restaurants."

Findings of the study are not encouraging for children's health, according to the authors. In 40% of homes and in more than 50% of family cars, children are exposed to tobacco smoke. Additionally, fewer than half of the parents/guardians consistently choose to sit in the smoke-free section of restaurants and trains, and less than half ask others not to smoke in the presence of their children. Families with low incomes and ethnic minorities were among the most likely not to have rules that limit



children's exposure to secondhand smoke outside the home. Families with income over \$41,000 per year were more likely to report having an entirely smoke-free home and to limit exposure outside the home.

Exposure to all this secondhand smoke – a Class A environmental carcinogen – is especially harmful to children, according to the World Health Organization. Higher incidence of lower respiratory tract infection (such as bronchitis and pneumonia), as well as middle ear diseases and worsening of asthma have been attributed to environmental tobacco smoke.

The results show the need for more public health efforts to ban smoking in public and other enclosed places, say the authors, in order to protect children from the effects of secondhand smoke.

(Source: "Family Rules About Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke," Sara A. Pyle, MA, and C. Keith Haddock, PhD, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Norman Hymowitz, PhD, Joseph Schwab, MD, and Sarah Meshberg, BA, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, New Jersey Medical School; *Families, Systems & Health*, Vol. 23, No. 1.)

The Myth of the Bad Parent

We've all seen it – a little girl throwing a fit in the bread aisle or a little boy kicking and screaming in front of the fragrance counter. Most parents have seen their own child behave the same way from time to time. Yet, it's common for people to react to this kind of behavior from other people's children by blaming the parent.

Being a parent isn't easy, and all parents are bound to make some mistakes. Different parents use different parenting techniques. Some parents try to negotiate. Others use a "time-out." Sadly, some parents become so frustrated and embarrassed by their child's behavior that they do resort to slapping, shaking or yelling at the child. Some seem to do nothing.

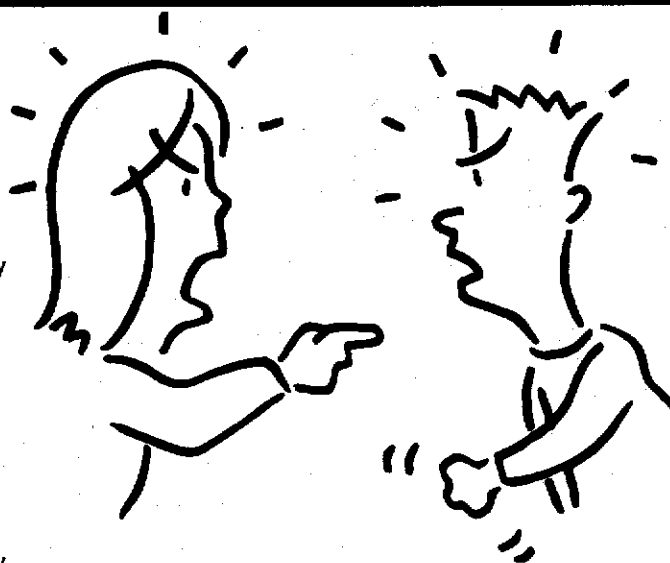
However, believing that a child's behavior problem is always the result of bad parenting is like believing poor grades are always the result of an ineffective teacher. Even the best teachers have students who get poor grades, and even the best parents can have a child with a behavior problem.

Some parents simply do not have the knowledge, skills or support they need to help them manage a child's behavior problem. Parents often are dealing with their own issues, such as unemployment, poverty or illness.

In spite of these challenges, all parents have strengths. Most parents know from experience what a child needs most. Parents are committed to both their child and their community. Parents are dedicated to helping children grow healthy and strong. Most of all, parents have a "built-in" motivation to do what's best for their child.

By building on these kinds of strengths, parents can develop better ways to take charge of their lives and to succeed. The key, however, is to find out what those strengths are.

"I don't see dysfunctional families," says Barbara Huff, executive director of the Federation of Families for



Children's Mental Health. "I see families that are over-stressed and under-supported."

There are many resources available to parents who have a child with a mental, emotional or behavioral problem. The federal Center for Mental Health Services, a component of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), can tell parents about services and support programs in your area. Many of these organizations have mentoring programs, support groups, parenting classes or respite care.

"When you build on child and family strengths," says Huff, "what you get is what kids and what families do best."

(Source: SAMHSA)

Inhalants: A Deadly Threat

Inhalants are common products found right in the home and/or at school and are among the most popular and deadly substances young people abuse. They are breathable chemical vapors that produce mind-altering effects when inhaled, sniffed or "huffed." Some of these substances are **nail polish remover, paint thinners, hair and deodorant sprays, aerosol air fresheners, correction fluid, Freon®, aerosol-propelled whipping cream** and many others. Parents, teachers and other school staff members need to learn about the dangers associated with inhalant abuse, and be proactive about monitoring children's activity at school and at home.

Young people use inhalants instead of other drugs because the products are widely available, inexpensive, easy to conceal and legal. Most users do not realize how dangerous inhalants can be. Many young people start because they don't think these substances can hurt them. Once hooked, they find it a tough habit to break. Inhalants are second only to marijuana in terms of adolescent drug use, and all kids are at risk. Youth drug use cuts across all geographic, socio-economic, racial and ethnic boundaries.

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Troy, Michigan

Performance Resource Press, Inc.
1270 Rankin Dr., Suite F
Troy, Michigan 48083-2843
248-588-7733
www.PRPonline.net

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Please send suggestions or contributions to the editor at the above address or through your student assistance program.

HELPING HAND is published monthly (September-May) to provide timely information to readers; its contents are not intended as advice for individual problems. Editorial material is to be used at the discretion of the reader and does not imply endorsement by the owner, publisher, editor, or distributors.

Teaching Tolerance

America — the great melting pot — has always been a rich blend of cultural traditions from all over the world. Many American families can trace their histories to immigrant ancestors who traveled great distances, enduring risk and hardship, to make a home where they would be guaranteed basic freedoms. And for many American families these freedoms came with a struggle. Their parents and grandparents were deprived the basic rights we value.

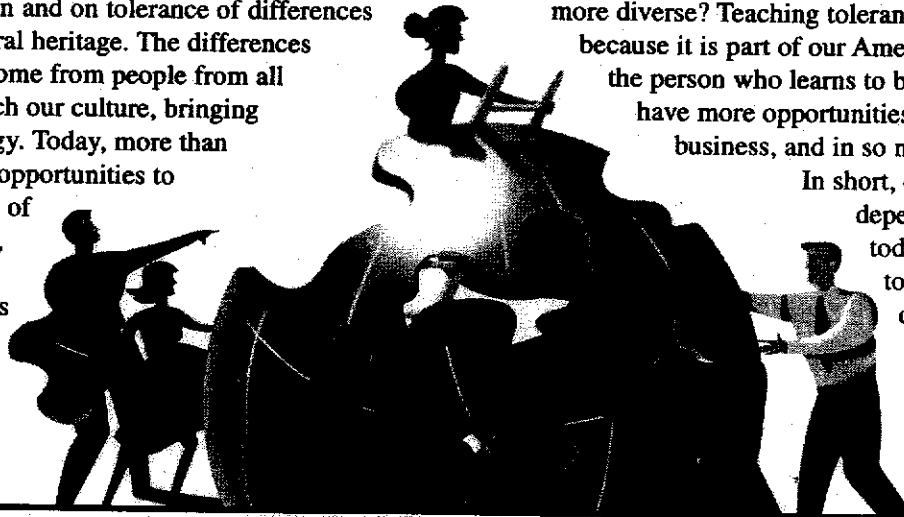
American society was founded on freedom from religious persecution and on tolerance of differences in beliefs and cultural heritage. The differences (or diversity) that come from people from all over the world enrich our culture, bringing new ideas and energy. Today, more than ever, children have opportunities to interact with people of differing ethnicities, religions, and cultures. Classrooms are increasingly diverse, reflecting the communities where families live and work.

Some adults welcome the fact that we live in an increasingly diverse society. Others may feel more hesitant, especially if they have not had much exposure to people different from themselves. Many children are way ahead of their parents in terms of exposure to cultural differences. Their circle of friends, their schoolmates, and their athletic teams are much more varied than those of even a generation ago.

Why is it important for adults to help children prepare to live, learn, and work in communities that will become even more diverse? Teaching tolerance is important not just because it is part of our American heritage but because the person who learns to be open to differences will have more opportunities — in education, in business, and in so many other ways.

In short, every child's success depends on it. Success in today's world — and tomorrow's — depends on being able to understand, appreciate, and work with others.

(Source:
Nemours Foundation)



Underage Youth Overexposed to Magazine Alcohol Advertising

A new study by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at Georgetown University found that underage youth are bombarded with advertisements for beer and distilled spirits when they read their favorite magazines. Various resources are available online to keep coalition leaders abreast of the alcohol industry's marketing toward youth.

For their recent study, CAMY analyzed 10,455 magazine alcohol ads between 2001 and 2003, valued at nearly \$1 billion. They found that 56% of the ad spending was placed in magazines with a disproportionate readership of underage youth. In October 2003, the trade associations for the beer and distilled spirits industries announced that their members would no longer place ads where underage youth comprise 30% or more of the

audience. However, CAMY researchers noted that, while some progress was made toward the 30% threshold, the industry should really be avoiding magazines that have a 15% underage readership.

"A 30% threshold allows double exposure. It permits the placement of ads in magazines with a disproportionate share of underage youth readers since they only make up roughly 15% of the population," said Jim O'Hara, CAMY executive director. "There is still too much alcohol advertising reaching a population for whom the product is illegal."

CAMY provides online resources for community advocacy on its "Take Action" web section, located at camy.org/action/.

The site features success stories from community organizations that have implemented environmental approaches to combat underage drinking and advertising, an interactive tool to determine a child's exposure to alcohol advertising, legal resources, state links, and case studies.



Hope and Healing

Most people are aware of the high costs of alcoholism. After all, no community in the United States can escape the strains that problems related to this illness place on the quality of community life. But many people do not realize that some of the most serious harm from this addiction is indirect and hidden. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Administrator, Charles G. Curie, "All too often, the silent suffering endured by many children whose parents are dependent on alcohol or illicit drugs goes undetected."

If knowledgeable and responsible citizens such as teachers act in time to help these children, the lifetime results can be very different. Heavy social and economic costs can be prevented or substantially diminished, according to the *National Association for Children of Alcoholics*, an education and advocacy organization that speaks for children whose parents suffer from alcoholism or drug addiction. An estimated one in four US children is exposed to a family alcohol problem. These children are of all ethnic groups; at all economic levels; and in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Scientific evidence shows that *children in families affected by alcohol abuse* are at increased risk for physical illness and

injury, emotional disturbances, educational deficits, behavior problems, and alcoholism or alcohol abuse in later life. In extreme cases, they face physical abuse or neglect.

Educational support groups are a good way to bring ongoing help to children. These groups can be offered through the following:

- Student assistance programs in schools.
- Programs developed in affiliation with alcohol treatment centers for the children of clients in treatment.
- Programs affiliated with religious institutions.
- Youth mentoring programs sponsored by community organizations.

The groups offer combinations of instruction, support, recreation, and one on-one mentoring. They also refer children to professional help if more than the group is needed. SAMHSA and NACoA have information about available materials for these programs. Mutual support groups often are helpful to teenagers. For example, Alateen meetings, sponsored nationwide by Al-Anon, are 12-step programs for teens living in families affected by alcoholism. Each group has an Al-Anon adult sponsor, but the young people support one another by sharing their strengths and hopes.

Inhalants *Continued*

Physical signs of inhalant use

- Unusual breath odor or chemical odor on clothing
- Spots and/or sores around the mouth
- Nausea and/or loss of appetite
- Slurred or disoriented speech
- Drunk, dazed or dizzy appearance
- Red or runny eyes or nose

According to the Monitoring the Future survey, about 3% of US children have tried inhalants by the time they reach fourth grade. And eighth-graders generally abuse inhalants at significantly higher rates than 10th-12th graders. So why are young people likely to use inhalants? Abuse primarily occurs because inhalants are readily available, inexpensive, and often unmonitored by parents. Most young users don't realize how toxic inhalants are, nor do they comprehend the short and long term effects. Learn more about the dangers at http://www.theantidrug.com/drug_info/drug_info_inhalants.asp

For more information, contact:

For more information about Chippewa Valley Schools' Student Assistance (drug and violence prevention) programming, please call 586/723-2360.