

## Tips to Help Students Recover From Traumatic Events

Teachers are among the most important adults in the transition and recovery of students affected by a natural disaster or other crisis. Their efforts will begin to give students a sense of stability, security, and belonging. Not only will students look to teachers for support, but the learning process and social environment of the classroom can contribute to students' ability to cope. Teachers can help by:

- Ensuring that displaced students feel welcomed and supported and that they are not bullied or ostracized.
- Reassuring students that they will be OK.
- Maintaining consistent and fair discipline.
- Providing flexibility such as extra time to do work.
- Showing empathy for what students are going through and making time to listen.
- Allowing students to keep in contact with others who survived the disaster.
- Providing a variety of methods and opportunities to express their reactions to the disaster.
- Creating opportunities for students to help others.

The early decisions educators make during a crisis will have far-reaching implications for both displaced students and the overall school climate. Administrators have the tasks of:

- Supporting parents who have difficulty separating from their children.
- Sponsoring parent gatherings so parents have a place to meet each other.
- Recognizing a wide range of students during assemblies with a special focus on making new students feel valued.
- Providing extra support for staff, including staff development for helping disaster victims, as well as time for teachers to meet and share frustrations.
- Being flexible and adaptable in an interim dynamic environment.



Children will react in their own ways and in their own timetables to their disaster experience. Most reactions are normal and typically go away with time. Teachers and parents should be observant and consider professional help, however, if severe reactions persist. Some ways adults can help children cope with a traumatic event include:

- Comforting clinging children and reassuring them they are safe — once they feel safe, they'll begin to let go.
- Listening when children need to talk about a traumatic experience.
- Providing opportunities for children to feel in control when their environment has felt out of control — such as choosing food, clothes, what games to play.
- Children feel safe if normal rules apply during traumatic events.
- Visiting a new school with your child before enrollment.
- Establishing daily routines as soon as possible.

If someone you know is experiencing difficulty as a result of a traumatic event, contact your school psychologist or student assistance counselor.

(Source: The Challenge c/o Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder)

# Finding High-Quality Child Care

Results of a series of nationwide focus groups reveal that parents have similar definitions of what constitutes high-quality child care and desperately want their children to have it. Parents also logically assume that child care is inspected and regulated, and that caregivers receive training before working with children. Unfortunately, this is often not the case. Finally, parents say that they cannot afford the quality of care that they desire, even if they can find it.

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) conducted the 14 focus groups in seven cities around the country, and has released a report summarizing their results, titled: *What Do Parents Think About Child Care?*

Parents in the focus groups wanted their children to be in clean, safe, and

loving environments. They wanted their children to learn new things. But cost, distance, and lack of choices often kept



parents from finding child care that fulfilled their wish lists.

According to a parent in Bartlesville, OK, "We didn't have a choice whether it was expensive or inexpensive because our choices were so limited."

But, one of the first words parents associate with childcare is "expensive." That high cost often forces parents to place their children in less than optimal care. As one parent in Boston explained: "Child care for both of my children costs \$2,000 a month. It is literally an infant-toddler college." In fact, in 42 states, the cost of care for an infant exceeds the cost of college!

In the report, parents agreed that quality standards for child care should be mandated and enforced. For the complete report, please visit: <http://www.naccrra.org/docs/policy/FocusGrpReport.pdf>

**HELPING  
HAND**

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## Low Response Young Drinkers Bound for Alcohol Problems

Young people who have a low response to alcohol often become alcoholics later in life, researchers say.

*The Australian* reported that a study of 453 men conducted over a 25-year period found that those who could drink more than their peers as youths later became alcoholics because they had to drink more to get intoxicated — which is why young people drink.

"A low response to alcohol is related to a higher alcoholism risk. We are now trying to find the genes — and there may be many — that affect a level of response," said researcher Mark Schuckit of the University of California. "Many of the people who later became alcoholic said that in their early days they could drink anyone under the table. They don't realize what is happening to them because they hang around people who drink like they do. It can be difficult for them to realize the troubles they are developing."



# Internet Use Benefits Some Teens, Causes Self-Destructive Behaviors for Others

Between 75% and 90% of teenagers use the Internet to e-mail, instant message (IM), visit chat rooms and explore other sites on the World Wide Web. According to research from the American Psychological Association (APA), spending a lot of time on the Web can have both negative and positive effects on young people, i.e., the sharing of self-injury practices by some and the improvement of academic performance and health awareness by others.

In a series of six articles, leading researchers examined normal behavior in chat rooms and the use of message boards by adolescents who self-injure, uses of the Internet to improve academic achievement among low-income youth; and ways to provide health information to youth living in developing countries.

To understand the role the Internet plays in linking marginalized adolescents and spreading potentially damaging behaviors, Cornell University researchers Janis L. Whitlock, PhD, Jane L. Powers, PhD, and John Eckenrode, PhD, explored the role Internet message boards play in creating communities centered around self-injurious practices. Self-injurious behavior typically refers to a variety of behaviors in which the individual purposefully inflicts harm to his or

her body without the obvious intent of committing suicide. The authors observed 406 message boards to investigate how adolescents solicit and share information related to self-injurious behavior. Females 14-20 years of age visited these bulletin boards the most.

The findings show that online interactions provide essential social support for otherwise isolated adolescents, but these online boards may also normalize and encourage self-injurious behavior and add potentially lethal behaviors to the repertoire of established adolescent self-injurers and those exploring identity options, said lead author Whitlock.

The authors also found that Internet message boards provide a powerful vehicle for bringing together self-injurious adolescents. Although the message boards examined for these two studies may not be representative of all self-injury message boards, they do provide a snapshot of content and exchange common in those with high activity. In the last five years, "hundreds of message boards specifically designed to provide a safe forum for self-injurious individuals have come into existence and may expose vulnerable adolescents to a subculture that normalizes and encourages self-injurious behavior," said Whitlock.

The Internet can also be a good educational tool for hard-to-reach populations. Researchers from Michigan State University examined the positive effects of home Internet access on the academic performance of low-income, mostly African American children and teenagers in their article, "Does Home Internet Use Influence the Academic Performance of Low-Income Children? Findings From the HomeNetToo Project." In this research, 140 children aged 10-18 years old (83% African American and 58% male), living in single-parent households (75%); with a \$15,000 or less median income, were followed for a two-year period to see whether home Internet use would influence academic achievement.

The children who participated in the HomeNetToo project were online for an average of 30 minutes a day. Findings indicate that children who used the Internet more had higher standardized test scores in reading and higher grade point averages (GPAs) at one year and at 16 months after the project began, compared to children who used the Internet less, said lead author Linda Jackson, PhD. Internet use had no effect on standardized test scores in math.

"Improvements in reading achievement may be attributable to the fact that spending more time online typically means spending more time reading," said Dr. Jackson. "GPAs may improve because GPAs are heavily dependent on reading skills," she added.

(Source: "Children, Adolescents, and the Internet"; Special section of *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 3.)



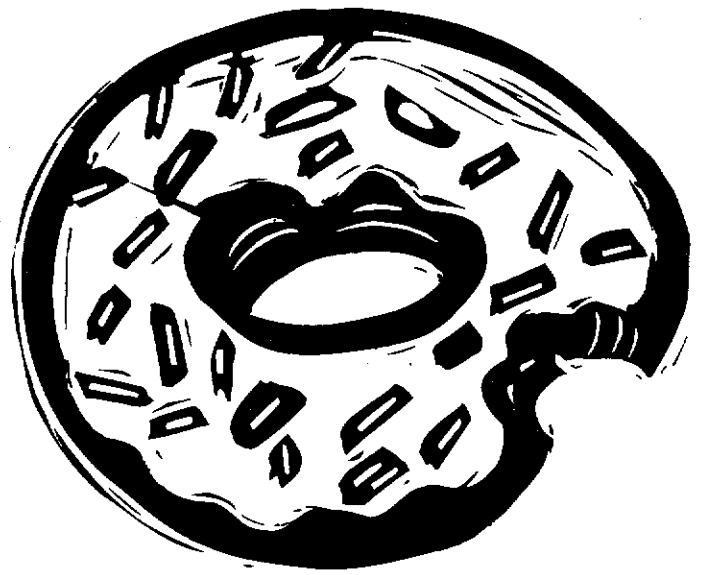
# Snack Foods in Schools Linked to Greater Body Mass for Some Students

School fund-raising through selling sweets and salty, fat-laden snacks at school puts some students — particularly those with overweight parents — at risk of increased body mass, new research published in the *Journal of Human Resources* suggests. The study is the first to use a nationally-representative sample to look at the link between the availability of junk food in schools and adolescents' weight.

"Schools tend to sell snack foods, often through cafeterias, school stores and vending machines, when doing so helps their budgets," says researcher Patricia M. Anderson, PhD, professor of economics at Dartmouth College. "We found that middle school and high school students who are exposed to junk food at school tend to have greater body mass, but this was true only for kids whose parents are overweight."

In their paper, the researchers suggest that factors like population growth, school accountability rules and property-tax restrictions may have simultaneously increased schools' need for new funds while limiting their ability to raise them through traditional means. As a result, many schools today drum up dollars to strengthen core academic programs and to support extras such as field trips, clubs and yearbooks by selling snack foods or signing soft drink and vending contracts.

"We need to look at both the benefits and costs of making snack foods available at school," Anderson suggests. "On the



benefit side, schools can raise a lot of money through snack food sales to increase their budgets for important programs. On the cost side, junk food exposure at school is associated with increased body mass, but this appears to be the case only for students whose parents are overweight. Based on the latter finding, policy makers and others might be disappointed if they are expecting reductions in junk food availability in schools to be the 'magic bullet' in the fight against adolescent obesity."

In the year 2000, students at 96% of US public and private high schools, 67% of middle schools, and 27% of elementary schools had access to food or soda vending machines.

(Source: *The Journal of Human Resources* at [http://www.wisc.edu/wisconsinpress/journals/journals/jhr\\_featured\\_articles.html](http://www.wisc.edu/wisconsinpress/journals/journals/jhr_featured_articles.html))

## For more information, contact:

For more information on Chippewa Valley Schools Student Assistance (drug and violence prevention) programming and/or the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families, please contact 723-2360.