

HELPING HAND

October, 2006

Volume 17, Issue 2

Teen Steroid Use Can Flip the Switch On for Years of Aggressive Behavior

Anabolic steroids not only make teens more aggressive, they may keep them that way into young adulthood. The effect ultimately wears off but there may be other, lasting consequences for the developing brain. These findings, published in *Behavioral Neuroscience*, also showed that aggression rose and fell in synch with neurotransmitter levels in the brain's aggression control region.

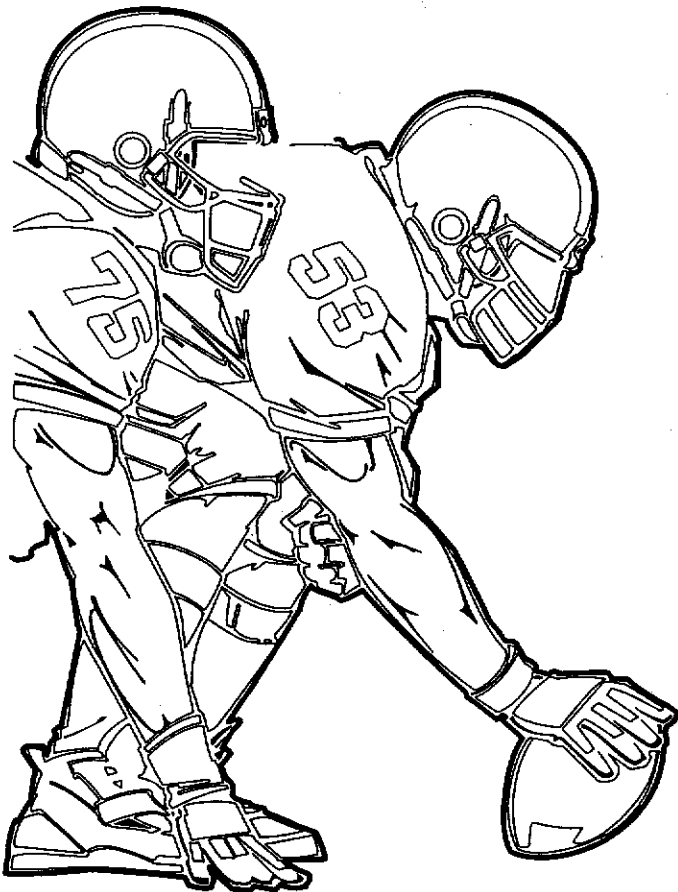
Neuroscientists are deeply concerned about rising adolescent abuse of anabolic-androgenic steroids (AASs),

given the National Institute on Drug Abuse's estimate that nearly half a million eighth- and 10th-grade students abuse AASs each year. Not only do steroids set kids up for heavier use of steroids and other drugs later in life, but long-term users can suffer from mood swings, hallucinations and paranoia; liver damage; high blood pressure; as well as increased risk of heart disease, stroke and some types of cancer. Withdrawal often brings depression, and recent research suggests that some AASs may even be habit-forming.

Overseen by Richard Melloni Jr., PhD, of Northeastern University in Boston, the current study of 76 adolescent hamsters compared how individual hamsters behaved when another hamster was put into their cages. Normally mild-mannered hamsters still defend their turf, learning aggression during puberty by play-fighting, much like humans. Their roughhousing normally includes wrestling and nibbling — pretty tame stuff.

However, hamsters injected with commonly-used steroids (suspended in oil) became extremely aggressive. Even after the drug was withdrawn, the newly vicious hamsters attacked, bit and chased the intruders. In fact, their aggressiveness measured *10 times* greater than that of control hamsters injected with oil only. Their full-blown aggression — clearly drug-induced — lasted for nearly two weeks of withdrawal, the equivalent of half their adolescence. Eventually, the aggressiveness subsided; by three weeks of withdrawal, all the hamsters greeted intruders with normal, playful defensiveness.

(SOURCE: "Plasticity in Anterior Hypothalamic Vasopressin Correlates With Aggression During a Anabolic-Androgenic Steroid Withdrawal in Hamsters," Jill M. Grimes, PhD, Lesley A. Ricci, PhD, and Richard H. Melloni Jr., PhD., Northeastern University. *Behavioral Neuroscience*, vol. 120, no. 1)



Pass It On to Parents: Essential Skills Every Mother and Father Must Have

Parenting is a huge, sometimes overwhelming job. But boiling the job down to seven essential parenting skills every parent should use makes the job more manageable.

Toni Schutta, parent coach and licensed psychologist, has taken some of the mystery out of parenting by providing a template that parents with children ages 3-12 can use every day.

"There are common building blocks that every parent needs to be successful," Schutta says. "There are also common problems that parents face on a daily basis, and the class I developed will help give parents the skills they need, answers to problems they face every day and the confidence to use the skills."

So what are the seven essential skills that every parent needs?

1. Keeping attachment strong

— "A lot of attention gets paid to building an attachment to children when they are infants, but then the topic gets shelved. I contend that a parent must continue to build and nurture the relationship with a child at every stage of his or her development. Attachment must be the essential building block that



other parenting skills flow from," Schutta says.

2. Using positive communication

— "The word choices that parents make every day have an incredible power to enhance or harm the relationship with a child. Parents must make a conscious choice to use positive communication that will build mutual respect, cooperation and self-esteem," Schutta explains.

3. Consistently using discipline methods

— "This is often where things fall apart," Schutta adds.

4. Creatively using defiance busters

— "The number one complaint I hear from parents is, 'He won't do something the first time I ask.' A parent needs to have a plan on how to handle defiance, because it happens almost every day," Schutta explains.

5. Managing a child's anger

— "It's hard to get through a day without a child feeling some type of frustration. Yet, parents typically do such a poor job teaching children how to express anger in a healthy way," Schutta says.

6. Reducing sibling hassles

— "Unwittingly, there are numerous ways that parents contribute to sibling rivalry on a daily basis. A parent can reduce his or her stress level significantly by learning how to handle sibling relations better," Schutta claims.

7. Boosting self-esteem

— "It's imperative to a child's success that they have strong self-esteem. A parent plays a key role in its development and must be conscious of choices s/he makes daily to influence a child's self-esteem," Schutta adds.

**HELPING
HAND**

v17i2

Copyright © MMVI
Troy, Michigan

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

Editor: Erin Bell
Graphic Designer: Diane Chatterson

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

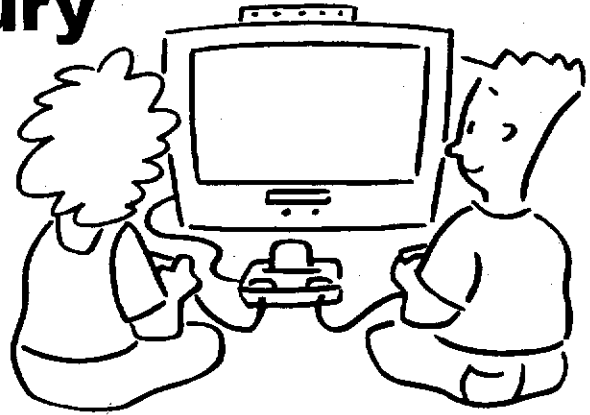
HELPING HAND is published monthly (September-May) to provide timely information to readers; its contents are not intended as advice for individual problems. Editorial material is to be used at the discretion of the reader and does not imply endorsement by the owner, publisher, editor, or distributors.

Repetitive Motion Injury

They're getting smaller, faster and more sophisticated by the minute, allowing us to do things we never dreamed possible. With the never-ending wave of new cell phones, PDAs, handheld games and other electronic gadgetry infiltrating our lives, it's no wonder that individuals of all ages have been experiencing an increase in repetitive motion injuries. From teacher to student, we are all using an increasing amount of electronic items on a daily basis.

Whether you're text messaging, playing video games or simply sending e-mails, you should:

- rest your eyes every 15 minutes, by looking away from the screen for a few minutes to something a short distance away and blinking your eyes rapidly for a few seconds.
- rest your hands after bursts of typing.
- stand up, move around, and do something else every 30 to 60 minutes.
- do quick stretches and gentle exercises every one to two hours.
- keep your back and wrist posture in a neutral position while sitting and keyboarding.
- configure your workstation appropriately so you have easy access to your equipment.
- keep your upper and lower back straight in neutral, whether using the back of chair or leaning forward.
- seat size should be appropriate for your height and size. Set your seat so that it does not compress the back of your knees.
- your feet should be in contact with the floor.
- balance your head so it's not tilted back or leaning too far forward.
- keep your upper arms close to your body and relaxed.
- keep your wrists at a neutral position, level with your forearm.
- make sure your chair armrests are not directly compressing any part of the forearms or elbows.
- move your mouse with motion from the forearm and not just the wrist.



Community-Based Learning Can Ignite Disengaged Students

It is not news that students are bored, no matter their background. According to Johns Hopkins researcher Robert Blum, 40% to 60% of students from all economic backgrounds are chronically disengaged from learning. Another study, just released by Civic Enterprises and funded by the Gates Foundation, highlights disengagement as a key factor in the dropout rate. That study found that 47% of dropouts left school because classes weren't interesting, and 81% of dropouts called for more "real-world" learning opportunities.

The good news is that research affirms community-based learning has profound impact on the problems of boredom and disengagement — by involving students in "real-world" problem solving that makes learning relevant and meaningful. This approach brings together under one roof a collection of teaching and learning strategies that have heretofore been seen as different programs: service learning; place-based education; environment-based education; civic education; work-based learning; and academically-based community service.

Community-based learning unites these approaches to teaching and learning through a set of common characteristics. The Coalition for Community Schools, in collaboration with leaders in these different arenas, identified these **five core characteristics**:

1. Learning occurs in places outside the standard classroom, and focuses on issues that have meaning for students.
2. Learning is active and provides students a role in decision-making.
3. Learning goals connect personal achievement to public purpose.
4. Ongoing assessment gives students the opportunity to learn from their successes and failures.
5. Community partnerships increase the resources and relationships available for student learning.

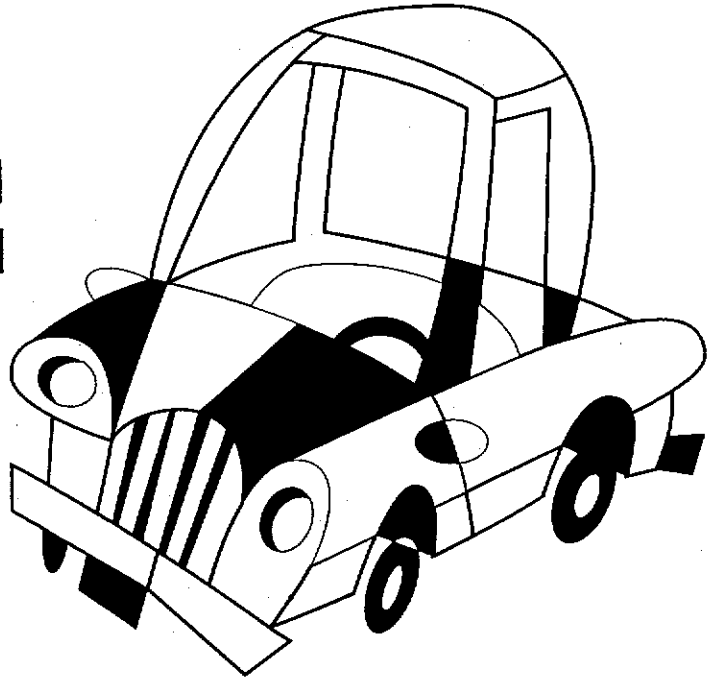
The study was supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, located in Flint, Mich. Copies of the report are available by download from the Coalition for Community Schools' website: www.communityschools.org.

America's Sleep-Deprived Teens Nodding Off at School and Behind the Wheel

Many of the nation's adolescents are falling asleep in class, arriving late to school, feeling down and driving drowsy because of a lack of sleep that gets worse as they get older, according to a new poll released by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF).

In a national survey on the sleep patterns of US adolescents (ages 11-17), NSF's 2006 *Sleep in America* poll finds that only 20% of adolescents get the recommended nine hours of sleep on school nights, and nearly one-half (45%) sleep less than eight hours on school nights.

The poll also finds that the amount of sleep declines as adolescents get older. The survey classifies nine or more hours a night as an optimal amount of sleep in line with sleep experts' recommendations for this age group, with less than eight hours classified as insufficient. Sixth-graders report they sleep an average of 8.4 hours on school nights, while 12th- graders sleep just 6.9 hours — 1.5 hours less than their younger peers and two hours less than recommended. In fact, by the time adolescents become high school seniors, they're missing out on nearly 12 hours of needed sleep each week.



As children reach adolescence, their circadian rhythms — or internal clocks — tend to shift, causing teens to naturally feel more alert later at night and wake up later in the morning. A trick of nature, this “phase delay” can make it difficult for them to fall asleep before 11:00 p.m.; more than one-half (54%) of high school seniors go to bed at 11:00 p.m. or later on school nights. However, the survey finds that on a typical school day, adolescents wake up around 6:30 a.m. in order to go to school, leaving many without the sleep they need.

For more information, contact:

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