

Senior Year and Beyond: Helping Your Adolescent with Challenges and Transitions

Helping Your Teen Make Healthy Decisions when it
Comes to Alcohol and/or Other Drugs

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All phone calls and consultations are **Confidential**

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Presentation Overview

- The Senior Year experience for your adolescent
- Your experience as the parent
- What to Expect in the Upcoming Year as your Teenager moves on to the Next Phase of Life

Senior Year: Put to the Test

Competition and Pressure for College-bound Students:

- Anxiety about grades and test scores
- Pressure to complete college applications
- College acceptances and rejections
- Ambivalence about “moving on”
- Concerns about finances

Senior Year: Put to the Test

Work and Military-bound Students:

- Anxiety about finding employment/military responsibilities
- Often feel less supported/valued than college bound students
- Feelings of “difference” from college-bound students magnified
- Ambivalent feelings about moving on
- Financial uncertainties

Senior Year: Alcohol and Other Drugs

**There is a strong association
between anxiety and alcohol and
other drug use**

Senior Year: Alcohol and Other Drugs

- Alcohol use increases significantly senior year
- Alcohol use from senior year to college is even more dramatic

Senior Year: Alcohol and Other Drugs

Factors Leading to Use:

- Decreased perception of risk of harm
- “Generational forgetting”
- Decrease in parental dialogue about AOD use
- Decrease in monitoring and supervision
- Normalization of use (Relaxed parental attitudes towards use, pro-drug media messages through television, movies, advertising and the social media)

Senior Year: Alcohol and Other Drugs

Consequences of Use:

- AOD use impairs judgment
- AOD use is associated with all risky behaviors
- There is an association with delinquent behavior, such as drinking and driving
- Alcohol abuse is the leading cause of death for teens
- AOD use can mask, cause or mimic psychiatric symptoms and syndromes and may interfere with treatment of mental health concerns

Senior Year: “Senioritis” & “Senior Slump”

- Relief to be finished with applications
- False bravado- Statements of “ I feel free” and “I can take on the world” is often mixed with feelings of fear
- No longer feel challenged, stimulated
- Begin to pull away from school and/or activities
- Mild depressive symptoms- lethargy/withdrawn
- Increased arguments with friends and/or family
- Increased AOD use on weekends and during breaks

Senior Year: The Separation Process

- Students often question themselves:
 - Am I ready for this?
 - How do I let go?
 - Can I take care of myself?
 - How will I make friends?
- There is a wide range of response to stress :
 - Second guessing decisions made, strained relationships with friends and family, Teens may distance themselves both physically and emotionally; they may stick closer to home
 - Lack of coping skills may lead to heavier use of AOD to deal with mixed emotions

Senior Year: Separation Process

- An enormous opportunity for personal growth can also occur during this separation process for both the Adolescent and the Parent***

Parents' Experience

- Pressure
- Anxiety
- Joy
- Relief
- Financial concern
- Loss of control
- Loneliness
- Change of roles

Tips for Parents

- Foster a more mature relationship
- Allow your senior to “stretch wings” in safe and constructive ways such as part time jobs, internships, maybe increased financial responsibility
- Maintain a set of “house rules”
- Recognize symptoms of stress and talk to you teen
- Remain involved

Tips for Parents

- Clarify your own values
- Be clear about a “no use” message
- Focus on health and safety issues
- Make a plan in case your teen finds him/herself in an unsafe situation
- Seek help if problems persist

Freshman Year: Risky Environment

- Largely unsupervised setting
- No built-in safety net (e.g. curfews, house rules)
- College policies such as attendance in class and even AOD use in dorms are often not enforced
- Free unstructured time
- AOD availability in a climate conducive to use

Freshman Year: Adjusting to Change

- Cohabiting with new people
- Establishing a new social network
- Pressure to conform
- Inexperienced with managing time, finances
- Facing new academic demands
- Concerned about well-being of family at home

Freshman Year: Alcohol & Other Drugs

- Alcohol and other drugs are readily available
- Students report using primarily to relax, minimize stress and anxiety and to have fun

Freshman Year: Alcohol and Other Drugs

Consequences of Excessive and Underage Drinking:

- **Academic Problems**: About 25% of college students report academic consequences because of their drinking including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers and receiving lower grades overall
- **Unsafe Sex**: 400,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 had unprotected sex and more than 100,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report having been too intoxicated to know if they consented to having sex

Freshman Year: Alcohol and Other Drugs

“My roommate came home very drunk. I didn't want to deal with it. I had 3 tests the next day and had planned to study, instead of playing “mom”. I was really scared... She was throwing things everywhere and crying...she was disgusting; I didn't want her to puke in my room. I flunked one test and skipped another. I was so drained.”

- College Student

Tips for Parents

- Recognize that your son/daughter's experience at college will be different than yours
 - Coed living
 - Less supervision
 - Increase in violence, including possible date rape and STD's
- Find out as much as possible about campus life
 - Visit the campus
 - Speak to current students
 - Explore the college website
 - Become familiar with campus policies

Tips for Parents

Prepare your son/daughter before they leave for college:

- Discuss the realities of living more independently
- Problem-solve in advance
- Plan for Safety
 - Don't go off with someone you don't know
 - Know who to call if you are in trouble
- Explore resources available on campus

Tips for Parents

Help your child with the Transition:

- Allow for an adjustment period
- Maintain contact without being overbearing
- Ask questions
- Hold your son/daughter accountable for actions
- It's never too late to establish a good relationship

Tips for Parents

How to Deal with Risks of AOD Use on Campus:

- Hold colleges accountable for activity on campus
- Make your values and expectations of no AOD use clear to your adolescent
- Ask your child about the level of AOD use on campus and in the dorms
- Watch for signs of trouble
- Identify campus resources

Tips for Parents

Address any Signs of Trouble

- **Warning Signs Include:**

- Excessive sadness, drop in grades, major personality changes, frequent illness, withdrawing from family contact

- **How to Help:**

- Identify campus and community resources
- Explore options for AOD-free living and activities

Tips for Parents

During College Breaks:

- Plan ahead
 - Clarify your expectations regarding AOD use
 - Work together to establish “house rules”
- Use this time as an opportunity to discuss their first semester experience
- Be honest about your feelings regarding important issues

High School Resources

- Mrs. Meredith Ohmes, Student Assistance Counselor
- Mr. Michael Muranelli, School Counselor
- Mr. Tim Pellegin, School Social Worker
- Mrs. Erin Ryan, School Counselor
- Mrs. Meredith Safer, Counseling Coordinator