

Whitman/Pyle Drug and Alcohol Forum
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Walt Whitman High School

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*The following is a compilation of the panelists' responses to questions posed by the principals and the audience. **Please also refer to the drug and alcohol resources available on the Whitman web site – including Q & A from the April 2014 Forum -- for helpful information to share with your family:***

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/whitmanhs/counseling/dahelp.aspx>.

General

What are trends panelists have noticed in drug/alcohol use among teens?

- Kids continue to start using alcohol and marijuana at younger ages.
- Binge drinking (drinking a lot of alcohol in a short period of time) continues to increase.
- Overall drinking is increasing exponentially; although the legal limit is a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 for driving, for example, police are finding 14-15 year olds who seem coherent with a BAC of 1.6 – such tolerance to the effects of large amounts of alcohol is an indication that they are drinking regularly.
- Many people don't realize that a single episode of excessive alcohol use can kill or cause permanent damage – alcohol poisoning or acute intoxication is a drug overdose, which can lead

to death or irreversible brain damage for those who survive. If you or your child is ever concerned that someone has had too much to drink, call 911 immediately for help (also, see “New Good Samaritan Law in Maryland” section, below).

- Because of recent laws legalizing and/or decriminalizing marijuana, plus some states’ allowance of medical marijuana, kids think marijuana is safe, and police are finding marijuana use is increasing.
- Concentrates of THC – the active ingredient in marijuana – have increased drastically since today’s parents of teens were growing up: police and hospitals now see concentrates of 80-90% THC; when parents were teens, the concentration was only 8-9%.
- Hospitals have seen teens in the ER with temporary psychosis, paranoia, hallucinations, suicidal ideation due to the high THC content in the marijuana they are using.
- Kids may use vaping pens to get high -- it is hard to detect any odor from the pens, making them popular; they may also be mistaken for e-cigarettes. The pens use highly concentrated THC (“dabbing” is the term for extracting a high concentration of THC from marijuana), which may be in liquid or solid form (“wax”), and may contain more than 80% pure THC – producing a high equal to 15-20 joints. Wax looks and feels like lip balm, and may be disguised as such; it may be eaten or smoked to produce a high.
- To avoid a potential citation, some teens choose to use marijuana at parties instead of alcohol -- police do not have an on-site test such as the “Breathalyzer” to detect marijuana use.
- Use of ADHD medications among Whitman students often occurs before standardized tests and when students have a lot of work to do in a short period of time (i.e., when they have waited until the last minute to write a paper).
- Heroin use continues to increase in upper Montgomery County.
- Over the last few years, some Whitman students have not graduated because of heroin addiction.
- Sometimes, student athletes get a legitimate prescription for pain medications such as oxycontin or vicodin for their injuries, and eventually become addicted; once they have run out of prescriptions from their doctor, they may turn to heroin use because it is readily available and much cheaper than prescription medication.
- Sometimes sleepovers are a sign of trouble – teens may arrange them in advance because they plan to use alcohol or other drugs that night, or they ask to have a sleepover at the last minute, if they have been using substances and don’t want their parents to find out at home. Other times, teens may use them as an opportunity to sneak out at night with their friends to drink and/or use drugs, etc. Parents should remain vigilant.

New Good Samaritan Law in Maryland

Can you talk about Maryland’s new Good Samaritan Law -- which went into effect October 1, 2014 – and the need to seek medical attention for someone who has gotten sick from alcohol and/or drugs? What would happen if teens or adults called 911 to get help for another teen (including what happens to other teens who are with the patient, and have also been drinking and/or using drugs)?

-and-

How do you know whether medical help is even needed? Why can’t you let someone “sleep it off,” drink coffee or water, etc.?

- Someone who calls in to report a person in need of medical attention is given immunity from charges regarding alcohol and drug possession. Other teens in the company of the caller -- but who did not make the call -- could potentially be charged.
- Medical help is needed if a person has symptoms such as convulsions, vomiting, cold, clammy skin, unconsciousness, elevated temperature, decreased body temperature, unresponsiveness, etc.
- It is important not to let someone “sleep it off” because occasionally it takes a few minutes for the person's vital signs to be affected enough that one could recognize signs of overdose. By the time someone realizes the person is in need of medical attention, it can be too late. Overdoses can occur very quickly.
- Many people don't realize that a single episode of excessive alcohol use can kill or cause permanent damage – alcohol poisoning or acute intoxication is a drug overdose, which can lead to death or irreversible brain damage for those who survive. If you or your child is ever concerned that someone has had too much to drink, call 911 immediately for help.
- For more information about the Good Samaritan Law go to:
<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/good-samaritan-laws-save-lives>.

Parenting

If a child asks his parents whether they used alcohol and other drugs when they were young, how should they respond?

- First, make sure you have time to talk – if that you are rushed at the time your child asks, you can tell him that you'd like to discuss it when you have more time (be sure to follow through on this).
- There is no need to give specifics. The question serves as a way for parents to begin talking to their kids and asking about what it's like to be a teen these days. Parents can acknowledge that they tried some things a few times. Parents may talk about what peer pressure was or wasn't like when they were in high school, and may talk about someone they knew who had a problem and how it changed the person's life.
- Parents may want to mention that drugs and alcohol have changed since they were young – there are drinks that are made with excessively high alcohol contents, THC in marijuana is much stronger these days, etc.
- Also new since parents were teens is that we now have more than 20 years of research about drug abuse, plus the technology to understand the vulnerabilities of the teen brain/how substances interact with and impair the young brain. We are entering into a time in which prevention is based on science, rather than guesses.

How should parents respond if they find their child under the influence of alcohol?

- First, be sure to stay with him, and watch for vomiting, difficulty breathing or slowed breathing, pale skin, etc. – call 911 or get him to the nearest emergency room if these symptoms occur.
- Don't discuss the matter of his drinking until he is sober, often the next morning. Both the child and the parent will then be more clear-headed during the discussion.
- When you do discuss the incident, remind him of your stance on drinking and determine what you think is the appropriate response and/or consequence.

- If this is a repeat occurrence, brief intervention can have powerful deterrent effects, serving as a wake-up call and offering a good message. Intervention could come in the form of having your child meet with his pediatrician to discuss what has happened.
- If a child is hospitalized with alcohol poisoning or is sent home from a function because of drinking, parents should seek a professional alcohol evaluation. This serves as a way to focus on the situation, and to help their child re-evaluate his or her decisions.

Can parents really influence their children when it comes to alcohol and other drugs?

- Kids report that parents do have an impact on their use of substances.
- Being mindful of your own drinking patterns is important, as children learn from their parents' examples. A helpful guide for this is "Rethinking Drinking," from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:
<http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/>.
- Being in touch with/getting to know the parents of your child's friends can be very helpful in keeping your own child and their children safe.

Marijuana

What are common misperceptions among teens and adults about marijuana?

- Students in middle school, high school and college often don't think of pot as a "real" drug.
- Students often don't understand that marijuana can be addictive. In fact, 1 in 6 people who start using marijuana in their teens become addicted.
- Many people don't realize that concentrates of THC – the active ingredient in marijuana – have increased drastically since today's parents of teens were growing up: police and hospitals now see concentrates of 80-90% THC; when parents were teens, the concentration was only 8-9%.
- Hospitals have seen teens in the ER with temporary psychosis, paranoia, hallucinations, suicidal ideation due to the high THC content in the marijuana they are using.
- Students may not realize that, in Maryland, marijuana is NEVER legal for someone under the age of 21, even with the new decriminalization of possessing small amounts of marijuana.
- Teens often think they can drive safely after using marijuana, or that they can drive more safely after using marijuana than after drinking alcohol. See "Driving" section, below.
- Many adults believe marijuana use is easily detected by the smell. However, when someone uses a vaping pen (looks like an e-cigarette) to get high, it is hard to detect any odor.
- Some adults may not be aware that the THC from marijuana can be used in various forms. For example, vaping pens use highly concentrated THC ("dabbing" is the term for extracting a high concentration of THC from marijuana), which may be in liquid or solid form ("wax"), and may contain more than 80% pure THC – producing a high equal to 15-20 joints. Wax looks and feels like lip balm, and may be disguised as such; it may be eaten or smoked to produce a high.
- Despite beliefs that marijuana is not harmful, it has been shown to decrease IQ, hinder memory recall, and have a profound negative impact on the brain – especially while the brain is still developing (the human brain continues to develop through at least age 25).

What are the Maryland laws pertaining to marijuana possession and distribution?

- In Maryland, marijuana is NEVER legal for someone under the age of 21, even with the new decriminalization of possessing small amounts of marijuana.
- A minor possessing less than 10 grams of marijuana would be issued a citation. If the juvenile has multiple offenses, the consequences increase with each offense.
- Someone age 18-20 found in possession of less than 10 grams of marijuana will be fined. The charge is a civil infraction. If they are charged a second time for possession under ten grams, they are fined a larger amount; a third offense requires an even higher fine, and the offender must go to court.
- Someone found in possession of drug paraphernalia for the first time would not be arrested; however, they can be incarcerated for a second offense if they are 18 or older; a juvenile found in possession for a second time would have to answer to the court.
- In Maryland, “possession” means being aware of and able to use the drug in question and having the drug within arm’s length (reachable); many people don’t realize that the legal definition is so broad.
- In Maryland, “distribution” is not defined by the specific amount of a drug, and a person does not have to sell the drug – just exchanging or giving the drug to someone would count as distribution.
- Under age 18, a person can be arrested for distributing marijuana, and held under the jurisdiction of juvenile court until age 21.
- For people ages 18 or older, distribution of marijuana is a felony, punishable with a maximum of 5 years in jail and 5 years of supervised probation.

Driving

General

- Students tend to accept that drinking and driving is dangerous, and many attempt to use designated drivers and taxi services when drinking; however, there is no guarantee that a designated teen driver will actually refrain from using any drugs and/or alcohol before driving friends.
- Police are seeing an increase in driving under the influence of marijuana.
- Teens often think they can drive safely after using marijuana, or that they can drive more safely after using marijuana than after drinking alcohol.

How can marijuana affect someone’s ability to drive safely?

- Marijuana negatively impacts many skills needed for safe driving:
 - ✓ Recall and short-term memory
 - ✓ Reaction time
 - ✓ Hand-eye coordination
 - ✓ Concentration and attentiveness
 - ✓ Perception of time, distance and speed
 - ✓ Ability to draw on information from past experiences
 - ✓ Judgment
 - ✓ Vision
 - ✓ Focus – marijuana increases a driver’s distractibility
 - ✓ Risk avoidance – marijuana increases a driver’s likelihood of taking risks

Which is less dangerous – drinking then driving or driving under the influence of marijuana?

- Alcohol and marijuana both impact the ability to drive safely.
- Many people don't know that combining alcohol and marijuana exponentially increases impairment and the risk of an accident in comparison to that caused by use of only one of the two substances.
- For fatal crashes, a driver under the influence of alcohol has a risk 13x that of a driver not under the influence; a driver under the influence of both marijuana and alcohol has a risk 24x that of a sober person.

How do the laws for driving under the influence of marijuana differ from those dealing with drinking and driving?

- Driving under the influence of marijuana and other drugs is illegal, just as it is for driving under the influence of alcohol.
- Being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs can affect a person's driving record, insurance, and the ability to possess a driver's license.

Isn't it true that police don't have ways to test for marijuana when pulling over a driver, since there is no "Breathalyzer" test for marijuana?

- No. Montgomery County has 15 police officers who are certified drug recognition experts. If a driver is pulled over and tested for alcohol use, but his blood alcohol content is inconsistent with the level of impairment the officer has witnessed, the driver can be arrested for driving under the influence (DUI), just as he would be if he had been driving over the legal limit for blood alcohol content. Then, a drug recognition expert would be called in to assess the cause of the driver's impairment (i.e., marijuana, other drugs, a mixture of alcohol and other drugs).

What should a child do about getting home safely if he is in a bad situation?

- Parents should talk with their children in advance about this topic. It is important to be clear and sincere that safety always comes first.
- Children should be able to call their parents in bad situations. They can agree upon a code word or phrase for calling or texting, to discreetly clue in parents that there is a problem.
- Parents should keep their phones turned on and nearby when their children are out, to ensure that they are reachable, if needed.
- Parents can encourage kids to contact them by giving assurances (and following through) that they will ask no questions, and will instead talk the following day about what happened.

Prescription Medications

General

- There are serious risks to taking any prescription medications without a medical need for them, and without a doctor's supervision for them.
- Parents should check the medicines in their homes – anything that is unneeded and includes a warning about driving, drowsiness, operating heavy machinery, etc. should be taken to a pharmacy for proper disposal. Do not leave the medications in the home or flush them down the toilet.
- Teens often take prescription medications from their homes and give them to friends.

- It is considered misuse to take any medication that has not been prescribed for you.

What are the legal risks of obtaining/using prescription medications without a prescription, and the risks of a student selling or sharing his or her legally-prescribed meds to someone else?

- In Maryland, “possession” means being aware of and able to use the drug in question and having the drug within arm’s length (reachable); many people don’t realize that the legal definition is so broad.
- In Maryland, “distribution” is not defined by the specific amount of a drug, and a person does not have to sell the drug – just exchanging or giving the drug to someone would count as distribution (even giving a friend 1 pill could count as distribution).

ADHD Medications

Is it dangerous for me to take one of my friends’ Adderall or other ADHD pills if it helps me focus and stay awake?

- There are many risks associated with taking ADHD medications:
 - ✓ Addiction
 - ✓ Heart attack
 - ✓ Stroke
 - ✓ Lethal seizures
 - ✓ Hostility and paranoia with higher doses
 - ✓ Depression
 - ✓ Exhaustion
 - ✓ Elevated heart rate
 - ✓ Irregular heartbeat
 - ✓ Dizziness
 - ✓ Fainting
 - ✓ When used to get high by crushing and injecting the medication, insoluble fillers in the medication can block small blood vessels.
 - ✓ When used to get high by crushing and snorting the medication, cardiovascular, addiction, mental health and behavioral risks can all increase.
 - ✓ Among mental health and behavioral risks of snorting are: aggression, hostility, violence, suicidal thoughts or actions, anxiety, agitation, hallucinations and delusions.
 - ✓ Extended release (“XR” or “ER”) capsules, which when taken as prescribed are intended to last all day, are more potent, and can cause such severe side effects as high fever, toxic shock and sudden death.

Parties

What should parents do when their children are invited to someone else’s house for a party, a sleepover, or even a small gathering?

- Speak to the parent/s ahead of time. Ask them if they will be checking in on the party from time to time (sometimes, host parents appreciate when the parents of guests offer to help with food or chaperoning); if they will be vigilant about any signs of trouble; what the hours of the party will be, etc.

- Sometimes sleepovers are a sign of trouble – teens may arrange them in advance because they plan to use alcohol or other drugs, or they ask to have a sleepover at the last minute, if they have been using substances and don't want their parents to find out at home.

What tips do you have for parents who want to host their children's friends for a party or other gathering, and to keep it drug and alcohol free?

- Lay out clear rules and expectations with your child in advance of the party, and be sure that their friends are held to those same rules.
- Keep the guest list to a specific number, and stick to it. Don't allow non-invited kids to attend. Through social networking, it's possible that large numbers of kids will show up for what was planned as a small party (i.e., 10 kids invited; 60 show up at the house).
- Kids will often sneak alcohol into a home by putting it in water bottles or in bottles of other non-alcoholic drinks. It is best not to allow outside drinks into the home.
- Backpacks and other bags are a way that kids may try to bring alcohol and/or other drugs to a home. You may ask guests to leave bags at home, or you may keep their bags stored in a place where only an adult chaperone has access, until guests leave the party.
- Teens may go out to their cars during a party, use drugs and alcohol in their vehicles, then come back into the party; it is best not to allow guests to go in and out of your home during a party.
- Be sure to balance giving your child and the guests some privacy with periodically going into the party area/s to replenish food and drinks, etc., and keeping an eye out for any signs of trouble.
- For more tips on hosting safe parties, see the "Tips for Safe Parties and Celebrations" section of the Drug and Alcohol Resources page on the Whitman web site.

Some parents want to keep their kids "safe" by hosting an alcohol party at home. What are the legal and other risks of hosting? Please be sure to speak to the Montgomery County Adult Host Responsibility Law and the fines and potential liability involved.

- Hosting parents may feel a false sense of security in taking away kids' car keys so they won't drive after drinking, but sexual assaults can occur in the party home, kids can become ill, injured, cause property damage, etc.
- Despite the risk of fines and liability, some parents knowingly hosting alcohol parties for minors.
- In Montgomery County, the fines for the adult host are as follows:
\$2,500 for the first underage drinker
\$5,000 for each additional underage drinker
- A parent host can also be held civilly liable up to \$10,000 if a guest leaves the party and something happens to him/her as a result of consuming alcohol in the host's home.
- Whether or not a homeowner is present and/or aware of a party, he could be sued for personal injury; alcohol poisoning; sexual assault; vandalism; violence; car crashes (death, injuries, car damage) that may occur as a result of a minor consuming alcohol in the host's home -- even if these acts occur after the minor has left the home.
- Homeowner and auto insurance companies may drop an adult host's policy.
- For more information about the Montgomery County Adult Host Responsibility Law and associated fines and liability, go to the "Montgomery County Laws and Juvenile Justice Process" section of the Drug and Alcohol Resources page on the Whitman web site, or go to: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DLCLRE/Resources/Files/pdffiles/adulthostresponsibilitybrochure2009.pdf>.

How should teens think through which parties they should attend?

- If you don't know the person holding the party, there are a large number of people going, you heard about it from another person, think twice about going. These parties may be more likely to have the police show up, or for other problems to arise, as well.

How would you recommend kids respond when police come to a party?

- Don't run.
- Be respectful and honest, and cooperate with the officers.

What happens when police arrive at a party?

- Police will request to be allowed to come into the home; however, if there is evidence that someone is in danger inside the home (i.e., ill from alcohol and/or other drugs, being assaulted, etc.) and police are not permitted to enter, they will forcibly enter the home.
- Once police are inside of a home, they will perform an alcohol breath test on each guest. While a minor could be cited for possession by being in the presence of drugs and alcohol, even if he has not been using them, police often allow kids with a blood alcohol content of zero to go home without a citation.
- Police do not have an on-site test such as the "Breathalyzer" to detect marijuana use. However, most officers can detect if someone is high. They will ensure that anyone who appears to be high has a safe ride home, even if that means calling the person's parents.
- Anyone under the age of 18 who has been drinking will receive a citation for possession of alcohol and will need to be picked up by their parent.
- Anyone who is found to be drinking and is at least age 18, but under 21 will be issued a citation, and officers will ensure that they have a safe ride home.
- The police report regarding the party will include such information as the number of teens present/the number who received citations; the schools they attend; the blood alcohol content of each teen; the type of alcohol used; how each teen obtained alcohol.
- Once a teen has been issued a citation, they become involved in the court system, rather than the police department. For a first-time citation, the Department of Juvenile Services will contact the family, set up an evaluation and make a recommendation for community service, an alcohol awareness class, etc. The protocol changes once a teen has been issued additional citations. After a second citation, he is eligible for Teen Court (run by the State's Attorney's office and the police department), which involves drug and alcohol education and a sentence/punishment determined by a jury of peers serving on the Court. After a third citation, a teen would be sent to juvenile detention.
- For more information about citations, go to the "Montgomery County Laws and Juvenile Justice Process" section of the Drug and Alcohol Resources page on the Whitman web site.

What are the potential effects of citations on a teen's future plans?

- Legal records are available online through Maryland Judiciary Case Search. Anyone -- including potential employers, colleges, etc. -- can access information about citations and/or arrests for a student age 18 or older. It is possible that scholarships, internships, etc. may be affected once this information is discovered. Records of citations issued to minors remain in the police department's internal computer system, and are not supposed to be shared with the public.

Detecting Drug and Alcohol Use and Abuse

What are the signs, symptoms, behaviors that indicate drug/alcohol use, whether a first experimentation, occasional use, frequent use, or addiction?

- First, don't ignore a feeling – you know your child best.
- Changes with your child, such as his friends, study habits, and/or behaviors like arguing about rules can sometimes indicate drug use.
- The following is not an exhaustive list of some indications and the drugs that can cause them, but may serve as a guide:
Extreme constriction of pupils (pain medication, heroin), pupil dilation (marijuana, stimulants, hallucinogens), difficulty with speech (pain medication, heroin, inhalants, alcohol, sedatives), odor (dissociative anesthetics such as PCP, alcohol, marijuana), tint of green or brown on the tongue (marijuana), redness/irritation around the nose if inhaling drugs (may include stimulants, pain medications, heroin).

What roles do family history and/or the age someone starts using substances play in the chances of developing an addiction?

- Because there can be a genetic predisposition for addiction to alcohol and other drugs, it is important to be aware of family history, and to share this information with your children.
- The earlier someone begins to use alcohol and/or other drugs, the more likely he is to develop problems with substance abuse and addiction.

What should parents do if they suspect their teen is using regularly, or is addicted?

- Drug stores like CVS sell over-the-counter drug screening kits, which parents may want to try.
- You will find the following resources in the “Treatment Information” section of the Drug and Alcohol Resources page on the Whitman web site.
 - ✓ *Screening and Assessment Services for Children and Adolescents (SASCA), Montgomery County*
 - ✓ *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Behavioral Health Treatment Facility Locator*
<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
 - ✓ *Suburban Hospital Outpatient Behavioral Health Services, 301-896-2036*
http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/suburban_hospital/medical_services/specialty_care/behavioral_health/addiction_treatment.html/
 - ✓ *The Partnership at Drugfree.org*
<http://www.drugfree.org/get-help/>

What should parents do if their child informs them of a friend's drug and/or alcohol use?

What should a student do if he is concerned about a friend?

- Consider the opportunity for early intervention to potentially help the friend avoid future problems.
- Parents and/or students may use the school's Student Assistance Program (SAP) to anonymously submit their concern about a specific student. SAP “is focused on prevention

through intervention and is not aimed at collecting evidence for criminal prosecution. Whitman High School provides this program to help at risk students.”

- Forms to submit a concern about a student are available on the Whitman web site, under “Students Quick Links” on the Students page, and on the Drug and Alcohol Resources page. Hard copies are also available at school, in boxes outside of the Career Information Center (CIC), and between rooms A234 and A236 -- the Computer Lab and Writing Center.