

## INTERVENING WITH YOUTH: DON'T UNDER-REACT, DON'T OVER-REACT, BUT REACT!

We get a lot of phone calls from parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, physicians, school counselors and teachers, brothers, sisters, and friends who are worried about a young person using and abusing alcohol or other drugs. Sometimes we get the call at the experimentation phase; sometimes the adolescent is addicted. All are stumped, and don't know what to do next.

How and when to intervene? Loved ones often feel as though they are watching a freight train barreling down the tracks. Friendly kids become defensive and conversation is difficult. A caller asked the question again just today: "Is this normal teenage behavior or something else?"

The primary rule of thumb is this: *it is never too early to take action, or too late, for that matter.* It's human nature to hope our problems fix themselves, whether the car is rattling, a joint is aching, or a child is struggling. The number one mistake we make, however, is waiting to address possible substance use. As our facilitators tell caregivers each month at Student Skills for Life- Parent Night, "Don't under-react, don't over-react, but react!"

Commonly, caregivers and other adults who suspect youth experimentation feel insecure about approaching a child without firm proof of alcohol or drug use. *We encourage adults to trust their intuition, and to spend more time planning a conversation than sleuthing out clues as to the exact substance, friends, location or date of use.* If you think there is something wrong, you're probably correct. This is not to say that having details isn't helpful, but many parents put off intervening in favor of more research.

Even if you can't prove that your child is using or what she's using, observations about her recent behavior are helpful. Choose a time for your conversation when the youth is sober and you are relatively calm. It's natural for caregivers to feel angry or betrayed by a child's experimentation, but putting those feelings aside will be far more productive.

The best way to start the conversation is to express your love and caring for your child, then bring up a specific instance you are concerned about and express your personal

feeling about it, followed by an open-ended question. Being honest, in a non-judging way, about the effects of the unwanted behavior provides a child's only gauge of the impact or harm she is causing. For instance,

*"On Friday night, you came home and your eyes were bloodshot. You couldn't look me in the eye, and I've felt upset and concerned. What's going on with you?"*

*Make every effort to focus on the deed, not the do-er.* In other words, make it clear through your words and actions that you dislike your child's behavior; not your child. In turn, she may not like the rules you are enforcing, but hopefully loves and respects you regardless.

*Have a goal in mind before initiating a conversation.* In the above example, the goal may be to let the child know you will be calling friends' parents to check out any other signs of drug use, or perhaps to simply set an earlier curfew time. This initial conversation is unlikely to solve all problems, so concentrate on what you're most concerned about. Let your child know the discussion will be ongoing, especially if she doesn't open up as much as you would have liked.

It's possible, of course, that the conversation will get heated or emotional despite your best intentions. Watch for defensive feelings and attempt to set them aside, keeping in mind that your child is entitled to her opinions. Taking a break or finishing the conversation later is always an option; just be sure to follow through. If you decide to talk again on the weekend, and you never initiate the follow-up, your teen will learn that you can be derailed if things get emotional enough.

*If you are spelling out consequences for future undesirable behavior, avoid making idle threats.* Think beforehand about your options, such as the above curfew, and what you can see yourself enforcing. Coming up with punishments you can't follow through with teaches children not to take you seriously. In addition, some experts recommend a written summary or contract outlining desired behaviors, repercussions if they're not met, and even privileges you'll

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extend if they are met. Keep the language positive, and post on the refrigerator where it won't be forgotten.

Addressing teen substance use is like entering a maze: you don't know at the beginning where you'll end up. While this can be scary, your family is worth it, and help is available along the way. Call Compass Mark for confidential, individualized guidance, including our free, three-hour parenting class, or check out [TimeToGetHelp.DrugFree.org](http://TimeToGetHelp.DrugFree.org) for a step-by-step guide to intervention and treatment.



## COLUMBIA BOROUGH MOBILIZES

In June of 2007 Compass Mark underwent a strategic planning process in order to establish our next moves toward our mission of substance abuse prevention. Part of that plan was choosing a community where we could concentrate our resources in order to make significant changes in harmful behaviors.

For the past five years, we have been working intensively in the Borough of Columbia to build relationships and bring evidence-based programming to the borough in partnership with the public schools and the Community Life Network of Columbia (CLN). The CLN is a non-profit coalition of the Columbia Ministerium, social-service agencies, businesses, healthcare providers, government officials and others who come together to provide a coordinated response to the social needs of the



community. Located at 510 Walnut Street, the CLN has drop-in hours for community members and provides information and referral services on a wide variety of needs through interim coordinator Kathy Scott.

The CLN is currently mobilizing its members around the creation of a mentoring program for the families of Columbia. Trained members will meet local families out in the community and schools,

as opposed to waiting for people to come into the office. The network hopes to engage residents who have needs such as food and clothing, employment, healthcare or health insurance, transportation, housing, family counseling or substance abuse treatment, who don't know about the office, perhaps being new to the area, or are hesitant to reach out.

The CLN's goal, according to Borough of Columbia Mayor Leo Lutz, is "to be proactive rather than reactive." If needs can be identified before there is a crisis, then residents may be able to avoid involvement with borough code enforcement, Children & Youth Agency, or disciplinary action from the school district, for instance. The CLN would like to assist people "before problems have progressed," says the Mayor. Carol Kuntz, CLN board member and Compass Mark Chief Operating Officer, feels such engagement will begin valuable relationships. "It's our job to show people that change is possible," she says.

The CLN will attend kindergarten registrations where caregivers will receive welcome packets, as well as a brief questionnaire asking about their current needs and whether they would like a follow-up call by a CLN member. The network will also run focus groups at school programs, church meals, and other events to solicit residents' thoughts about this new form of outreach. The theme of the questions will be, "How can we be there for you?" states Kuntz.

The CLN is proud of the efforts Columbia is making, and hopes the borough can be a model for other communities who wish to give voice to their residents.

*The Community Life Network can be reached at (717) 684-8094.*



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... As well as many dedicated, part-time facilitators and volunteers

When you finish reading your newsletter, please share it with a friend!

## AFTER-SCHOOL CLUB HELPS CANCER SOCIETY

Dana Glover likes to work with kids. A licensed cosmetology instructor, she could work with high school or college-aged students, preparing them for careers. But Dana, in addition to running her own salon, teaches the beauty basics to elementary and middle school students.

Dana's Cosmetology Club is one of many after-school enrichment activities provided by Compass Mark for students in Burrowes and Lafayette Elementary and Lincoln and Wheatland Middle Schools in the School District of Lancaster. Funded by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Grant, after-school programming engages children academically and socially in the time period after school when research shows they are most at risk for substance use or other health-damaging behaviors.

Cosmetology Club consists of four units: manicures, nail art, facials and wig-making. Dana teaches the same skills to both elementary and secondary students, who learn about proper technique and sanitization. When possible, she uses natural materials the kids already have at home, such as oatmeal and honey facials or lemon juice astringent. Practice makes perfect, so students are assigned homework. They practice salon-style pampering on their families and friends,



*A mannequin stands ready to assist Lincoln Middle School students as they create a wig for women undergoing chemotherapy.*

who we can only guess are happy to help!

During the final unit of the school year, students make wigs for cancer patients who have lost their hair. Dana partners with the [American Cancer Society Wig Bank](#) which provides a free headscarf and wig, when available, to women beginning chemotherapy. Wigs, especially those made of human hair, are always in short supply, so the students' efforts are vital.

Dana purchases real hair from a supply company which the students layer onto a wave cap with wig adhesive. Each layer must be allowed to dry before more hair is added. Dana began making

wigs when several of her female relatives were diagnosed with cancer and subsequently lost their hair. She felt that making wigs was something she could do to help and make a difference in their lives. She went on to instruct McCaskey High School students in the cosmetology elective on wig-making, and finds the skills translate well to the younger grades.

Students signing up for Cosmetology Club don't always know they will be performing an act of kindness for someone in their community. When the wig program is explained, most kids have stories to share of how their

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## LIQUOR STORE PRIVATIZATION: QUESTIONS TO ASK

Ask people on the street whether the state should privatize the wine and spirits stores and you're likely to get strong opinions, pro or con. Ask people on the street for facts behind their opinions and you might get blank stares. At Compass Mark, we have met extensively with legislators, the governor's staff, business analysts, the CEO and staff of the [Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board](#) and many others who are central to this issue. We have reviewed research from across the nation and from other countries as well as past and current proposed legislation. Some of the information we've gathered may surprise you.

The current distribution system is a valuable asset, and as a citizen of the Commonwealth, you are one of its owners. Before settling into an opinion on the sale of your property, consider a few questions: What will a sale of the licenses likely generate in one-time revenue? How many stores exist now and how many will exist after privatization? What changes to the tax structure will accompany privatization?

Will those changes decrease state revenues or increase other taxes? Will availability increase and prices decrease or will availability decrease and prices increase? Who will monitor sales to minors? Who monitors them now? Who will pay for financial auditing of licensees? Will out-of-state and international licensees pay any PA corporate income taxes on sales? What are the findings of the [Center for Disease Control regarding privatization](#)?

We believe that privatization itself is neither good nor bad, but the structure of either the existing or any new system is of critical importance. We invite you to call our Executive Director, [David Bender](#), to find out what we've discovered through asking many questions about the current and proposed systems. Once your property is sold, there's no getting it back. That's why we're learning the facts and choosing to have a voice in the process. We hope you will too.



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family or friends have been touched by cancer, and are excited about the project.

“The idea took off,” explains Dana. “The kids wanted to help. We could have been doing pedicures, something more fun, but they wanted to do this.” Some students were initially more interested than others to be attending after-school activities, but they bonded with Dana and each other and began to look forward to the club. “We



*Cosmetology Club members from Lafayette Elementary School in Lancaster.*

became a little family,” says Dana. “I couldn’t ask for anything more!”

Dana is already looking to next year, searching for a cancer survivor to come and speak to the children, preferably someone who used the American Cancer Society Wig Bank. Contact Compass Mark at (717) 299-2831 if you have resources, including a speaker, for Cosmetology Club.

Visit Dana’s salon, *Spiritually You*, on Franklin Street in Lancaster or on Facebook!



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