



What's New For Schools

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY, INC.

AN INFORMATIVE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR MIDDLESEX COUNTY EDUCATORS

Vol.I, No. 3, March 2007

About Self-Injury

By Dena Charbonneau, MSW, LSW, CPS

Self-injury, also known as self-mutilation, self-harm, or self-abuse, is defined as the deliberate, repetitive, impulsive, non-lethal harming of one's self. Self-injury includes, but is not limited to, cutting, scratching, picking scabs or interfering with wound healing, burning, punching self or objects, infecting oneself, inserting objects in skin, bruising or breaking bones, and some forms of hair-pulling. These behaviors, which pose serious risks, may be symptoms of a mental health problem that can be treated.

Experts estimate the incidence of habitual self-injurers is nearly 4 % of the population, with an almost equal number of males and females, although more females present for treatment. Recent studies of high school and college students put the number at approximately one in five. The typical onset of self-harming acts is at puberty, although it can be seen in young children as well as adults. The behaviors often last for 5-10 years but can persist much longer without appropriate treatment.

Self-injury is found in almost equal numbers in all ethnic groups. Nearly 50% of self injurers report physical and/or sexual abuse during his or her childhood. Many report that they were discouraged from expressing emotions, particularly anger and sadness.

Many who self-harm use multiple methods. Cutting arms or legs is the most common practice. Self-injurers may attempt to conceal the resultant scarring with clothing and if discovered, often make excuses as to how an injury happened. A significant number are also struggling with eating disorders

and alcohol or substance abuse problems. An estimated one-half to two-thirds of self-injurers have an eating disorder.

Self-injurers commonly report they feel empty inside, over or under stimulated, unable to express their feelings, lonely, not understood by others, and fearful of intimate relationships and adult responsibilities. Self-injury is their way to cope with or relieve painful or hard-to-express feelings and is generally not a suicide attempt. However, relief is temporary, and a self-destructive cycle often develops without proper treatment.

Self-injurers often become desperate about their lack of self-control and the addictive-like nature of their acts, which may lead them to true suicide attempts. The self-injury behaviors may also cause more harm than intended, which could result in medical complications or death. Eating disorders and alcohol or substance abuse intensify the threats to the individual's overall health and quality of life.

Self-injury is increasingly becoming a recognized problem in schools and all staff need a general understanding of self-injury, need to know signs to look out for and what to do if they become aware that a pupil is self-injuring. Here is some helpful advice for educators:

- There should be a designated member of staff at your school to deal with self-injury.
- Listen to the student and try not to show them if you are angry, frustrated, or upset.

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NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit community-based health organization serving Middlesex County. Our mission is to promote the health and well-being of individuals and communities of Middlesex County through the reduction or elimination of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use problems. Tax deductible contributions may be made to:

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New Jersey's Random Tests for Steroids are Working

By Ezra Helfand

High school athletes in New Jersey are the first in the nation being required to submit to random tests for steroids when their teams reach state playoffs. The results so far show the program is working.

Results released from the first round of testing, in the fall 2006 sports season, showed no positive tests. With the winter championships now in full swing, 180 more athletes are to be tested. And by the end of spring sports, the urine of 500 athletes will have been checked for steroids.

The New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association is overseeing the testing program.

New Jersey's first-in-the-nation drug testing program was adopted during then-Gov. Richard Codey's tenure. A positive test result gets an underclassman banned from school sports for a year and requires the student to undergo counseling. (The student's team is not forced to forfeit any games.) Seniors in sports where athletes can win individual awards are stripped of their awards or titles. There is no notification after negative results, but parents are notified of a child's positive result within about a week. Families have the right to ask for a second test on a backup urine sample, and the school is not alerted until the results are confirmed by a medical review examiner.

New Jersey has roughly 240,000 high school sports participants, 10,000 of whom reach state championship competitions.

Third in a Series - About Developmental Assets

Reprinted from The Search Institute's Website (<http://www.search-institute.org/whatsnew/>)

Many things you personally do—or could do—every day make a big difference for children and teenagers. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, teacher, neighbor, friend, or someone who just sees young people in the mall, in the neighborhood, or on the street corner, there are many ways you can help young people succeed.

How? By building developmental assets—positive relationships, experiences, and inner strengths that all young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Search Institute research on thousands of young people has shown that having these assets can make a tremendous difference in young people's lives, giving them strength to make positive choices.

Search Institute organizes the 40 developmental assets into eight categories. The first four categories (20 assets) are “external assets”—relationships, experiences, and opportunities provided by nuclear and extended families, caring adults and peers, neighborhoods, and institutions within communities. The other four categories are “internal assets,” which focus on the commitments, values, skills, and outlook on life that guide young people's choices.

Here are eight ways you can build developmental assets—one for each category of assets. (Words in capital letters are the names of the asset categories.) In future issues of *What's New For Schools* we plan to publish ideas for how to build those assets for all ages of children and youth.

- SUPPORT young people with your caring and attention.
- EMPOWER them to use their abilities to help others.
- Set reasonable BOUNDARIES and have high EXPECTATIONS.
- Help them find activities that make CONSTRUCTIVE USE of their TIME.
- Spark their COMMITMENT TO LEARNING.
- Guide them toward a life based on POSITIVE VALUES.
- Help them develop SOCIAL COMPETENCIES and life skills.
- Celebrate their uniqueness and affirm their POSITIVE IDENTITY.

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- Learn the difference between self-injury and suicide.
- If someone tells you that he or she self-injures, it means they trust you and are willing to share this personal problem.
- Some people may want to be heard and empathized with. Try not to push them by asking questions that may overwhelm them.
- If they want to talk to their parents about their self-injury, it may be helpful if you offer to act as a mediator.
- Self-injury is not the only way for people to deal with emotional distress. Try to encourage the young person to seek alternative and more constructive coping mechanisms. However, do not expect them to be able to stop self-injuring on their own.
- Consider having brochures available for the students about self-injury and where to get further help.

If you would like additional information on this topic, please visit the following sites:

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry – www.aacap.org
- SAFE (Self-Abuse Finally Ends) Alternatives Program – www.selfinjury.com

Attention Middlesex Educators - Using a newspaper in the classroom improves student vocabulary skills, increases knowledge and encourages a positive attitude toward learning.

If you are interested in receiving free copies of *The Home News Tribune*, please call Ezra at NCADD at 732-254-3344 or email at ezra@ncadd-middlesex.org.

PSA Contest Open to Middlesex County High School Students

By Rachel Prupis, MSW Intern

Middlesex County High School students are encouraged to submit entries for the 8th Annual “Don’t Drink and Drive” 3D Public Service Announcement Video Contest. Students can reach out to their peers by using their talents to create a PSA up to 30 seconds long that will highlight the consequences of drinking and driving. One English and one Spanish PSA can be submitted from each school.

The top three PSA’s will be awarded \$1,000, \$750, and \$500 respectively, to be used for Project Graduation or any Driver Safety and Awareness Program.

The campaign will culminate with “Media Mix,” providing students with workshops facilitated by local media personalities. The event will be followed by an award luncheon where all PSA’s will be shown for the first time, winners will be announced, and all participants will be recognized. Winning students will also receive a gift certificate.

The 8th Annual “Don’t Drink and Drive” 3D Public Service Announcement Video Contest is sponsored by:

- The Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders
- Middlesex County Superintendent of Schools
- Injury Prevention Program of the Level One Trauma Center Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital
- The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc.

Submissions are due March 30, 2007.

For more information, contact Rachel Prupis at NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. at 732-254-3344.

