

## Answering the Questions of Substance Use

On April 23 two hundred and fifty community members came together to network about substance abuse by children at a session jointly sponsored by the Davis public schools and parent groups. DaVinci High School Principal Pamela Mari framed the evening's discussion with her introduction, joined onstage by principals, vice principals, and counselors from all secondary schools in Davis:

*"I think we could all agree that our community prides itself on creating an optimum environment for the health and education of children. Think of how many times you have heard someone remark that Davis is a wonderful place to raise children. And it is! The parks, streets, schools, neighborhoods, even the ethos of decision making in our city reflects and supports the high value on healthy and well-educated children. We insist on healthy food and start sports as early as preschool. We send our children to camp, take them on family trips and field trips, demand shade structures, sunscreen, bike helmets, and soft landings around play structures. We provide lessons of every imaginable type and cheerfully spend literally years of our lives driving in little circles of child pick-up and delivery, carpooling, writing checks, and cutting up oranges.*

*"We seem to think that if we fill every day with the 'right' activities and become textbook 'good parents' and vigilant guardians, we will be able to save them from the perils of our times. Against our own experiences, and all logic, we hope that maybe sports will be the vaccine for temptation, or piano lessons a talisman to risky behavior. Attending every play and open house will guarantee that they never endanger themselves. And school - we monitor and contribute to school as the safeguard against destructive habits, and the portal to a fulfilling future.*

*"The truth, of course, is that this is what psychologists sometimes call 'magical thinking.' Just because we wish it so, does not make it necessarily possible or true. One must recognize that Davis does occupy space in a real world, not a bubble. And on balance to all the protections we afford, our kids also have money, and cars, and time, and access, and freedom, and have been effectively trained to advocate for themselves and to make their own decisions.*

*"Now, every one of us has been a teenager, so we can all attest: teens are brilliant when it comes to magical thinking. As a group they are legendary for believing they won't be the one to get hurt, won't be caught, won't be blamed, won't be responsible for the choices they are making, even when they absolutely know better. If you ask, "What were you thinking?" you are likely to get an honest answer when they say, "I don't know." Unfortunately this magical thinking on the part of both teens and their caretakers ignores the power of peer pressure, impulsivity, lack of experience, stress, fear of exclusion, and identity conflict – the emotional hallmarks of the march to adulthood.*

*“What are we to do? How are we to handle the divide between what we would choose for our children and what they can choose for themselves? How do we handle our teens’ safety while we may be suffering in some measure along side them as we watch them move away from our sheltering grasp, to a world we do not share and into which we are not invited?”*

Ms. Mari went on to suggest that parents need to inform themselves about what illegal substances are available and how they can be abused, learn effective parenting techniques, become aware of what resources are available when children are abusing substances, and assist in implementing cohesive, community-based approaches to rearing healthy kids. Each of these topics was addressed by presenters during the course of the evening.

Following Ms. Mari’s remarks, Trease Petersen, Youth Intervention Specialist with Davis Police Dept., and Roy Giorgi of the Yolo County Narcotics Enforcement Team described the nature of illegal substance use in our community. In the course of her job, Officer Petersen reviews all arrests of juveniles in Davis between the ages of 11-17. She offered some sobering statistics: there were 113 arrests of juveniles in 2005-2006 for use of illegal substances which include marijuana, alcohol, methamphetamine, and mushrooms/ecstasy. Of particular concern is the rise in use of ecstasy in Yolo County. During 2004, 17 pills were seized; during 2005, 854 pills were seized; and in 2006, 8,964 pills were seized with a street value of \$180,000.

Based on her own experience working with Davis children who abuse substances, Officer Petersen offered the following advice to parents:

- Be sensitive to the stress in your children’s lives and help them cope.
- Understand when and why your kids are bored and help them to relieve their boredom through healthy, scheduled activities.
- Limit the amount of spending money your kids have and monitor how it is spent.
- Know your children’s friends. Get first and last names, phone numbers and addresses of not only their friends, but the parents as well. Ask who, what, when, where, why and how.
- Engage in your children’s lives. Help them with homework, attend their events, participate in activities together and talk to them about drugs. If you don’t engage your kids, someone or something else will.

The evening’s speakers also included Robert MacKenzie, Sheila Walker, Sheila Smith, Deborah Kimokeo, Sgt. Dave Delaini, and Lt. Darren Pytel. Following the

presentations, speakers and audience had an opportunity to share ideas and resources informally.

In the days after the forum, organizers received feedback that parents, police, and administrators felt better able to work effectively together on cases of substance abuse, students reported that parents were engaging them in more discussion of the topic, and two families indicated they intervened to help their children stop abusing substances.

For those who would like more information, the following online resources are available.

Drugs and Youth: An Information Guide for Parents and Educators

[http://safestate.org/documents/Drugs\\_and\\_Youth\\_\\_A\\_Parents\\_Guide.pdf](http://safestate.org/documents/Drugs_and_Youth__A_Parents_Guide.pdf)

Tips for Parents: Underage Drinking in California What Can You Do?

[http://safestate.org/documents/Drugs\\_Parent\\_Toolkit\\_on\\_Underage\\_Drinking\\_A\\_DA.pdf](http://safestate.org/documents/Drugs_Parent_Toolkit_on_Underage_Drinking_A_DA.pdf)

In addition, the PTA will facilitate a meeting of parents interested in forming an independent support group. This will take place **Monday, June 4 at 7:30 pm** at 1309 Notre Dame Drive. All are welcome.

Finally, to further assist students and their families in becoming better informed on this topic, the PTA will donate to the DHS library a DVD copy of *Addiction*, the critically acclaimed HBO film released in March 2007.

Susan Lovenburg and Kris Inouye  
DHS PTA Parent Education Coordinators