



Helping Hand

Sponsored by: *The Glen Ridge Municipal Alliance Committee* Volume 19 Issue Seven

How Parents Can Help with Homework

When mothers and fathers get involved with their children's homework, communication between the school and family can improve. It can clarify for parents what is expected of students. It can give parents a firsthand idea of what students are learning and how well their child is doing in school. Research shows that if a child is having difficulty with homework, parents should become involved by paying close attention. They should expect more requests from teachers for their help. If a child is doing well in school, parents should consider shifting their efforts to providing support for their child's own choices about how to do homework. Parents should avoid interfering in the independent completion of assignments.

READING HOMEWORK TIPS FOR PARENTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

- Have your child read aloud to you every night.
- Choose a quiet place, free from distractions, for your child to do his nightly reading assignments.
- As your child reads, point out spelling and sound patterns such as cat, pat, hat.
- When your child reads aloud to you and makes a mistake, point out the words she has missed and help her to read the word correctly.
- After your child has stopped to correct a word he has read, have him go back and reread the entire sentence from the beginning to make sure he understands what the sentence is saying.
- Ask your child to tell you in her own words what happened in a story.
- To check your child's understanding of what he is reading, occasionally pause and ask your child questions about the characters and events in the story.
- Ask your child why she thinks a character acted in a certain way and ask your child to support her answer with information from the story.

Eating Disorder Warning Signs

Are you concerned that a friend, coworker, student or loved one has an eating disorder? Because everyone today seems concerned about weight, and because most people diet at least once in a while, it is hard to tell what normal behavior is and what behaviors indicate that is a problem that may escalate to threaten life and happiness. No one person will show all of the characteristics listed below, but people with eating disorders will manifest several. In addition, the early stages of an eating disorder can be difficult to define.

The sooner an eating disorder is treated, the easier it is for the person to recover. If warning signs and symptoms are allowed to persist until they become entrenched behaviors, the person may struggle for years before s/he can turn the problem around.

Some warning signs of an eating disorder are as follows:

- The person skips meals, takes only tiny portions, will not eat in front of other people, eats in ritualistic ways, and mixes strange food combinations. May chew mouthfuls of food but spits them out before swallowing. Grocery shops and cooks for the entire household, but will not eat the tasty meals. Always has an excuse not to eat — is not hungry, just ate with a friend, is feeling ill, is upset, and so forth.
- Becomes “disgusted” with former favorite foods like red meat and desserts. Will eat only a few “safe” foods. Boasts about how healthy the meals s/he does consume are.
- Usually has a diet soda in hand. Drastically reduces or completely eliminates fat intake. Reads food labels religiously. If s/he breaks self-imposed rigid discipline and eats normal or large portions, excuses self from the table to vomit and get rid of the calories.
- The person exercises excessively and compulsively. May tire easily, keeping up a harsh regimen only through sheer will power. As time passes, athletic performance suffers. Even so, s/he refuses to change excessively demanding routines.

As with others suffering from behavioral health issues, people with eating disorders require immediate assistance from a professional, such as a counselor or physician. Share your concerns with the person and try and help them seek help.

Making Physical Education Safe for Everyone

Physical education continues to have a very important role in the lives of students, especially today, as more students engage in low-energy activities like surfing the ‘net, playing video games, and text-messaging their friends via cell phone. Besides allowing students the opportunity to get much-needed exercise, PE class can also teach students about teamwork and other core values. It is important, however, to make PE class safe for all students. One important tip is to make sure PE teachers are aware of students with special health needs.

At the beginning of each semester, PE teachers should meet with a member of the school’s administrative team to review school medical records of students. PE teachers should be familiar with any conditions students might have that could require medication or attention. Additionally, the PE instructor should become familiar with dispersal of medications (such as an asthma inhaler) that students might need during PE.

Another way to make PE safe for all is make the classes a bully-free zone. We’ve all seen the movies where the class bully pummels a weaker classmate in a no holds barred game of dodge ball. Typically, art does imitate reality, so make sure no bullying is going on in class. Instead of allowing students to pick their own teams, assist them in putting together teams for class so the same students don’t always end up getting picked last for team sports. Additionally, explore activities and sports from other regions and countries to encourage an environment of diversity.

Preventing Underage Drinking Should Be A Community Effort

Underage drinking is a public health issue. For that reason, all members of the public who interface with young people can work to prevent underage drinking and its impact on society. Here's what each can do.

- **Students.** Young people are a first line of defense in preventing underage drinking. Just as they can influence other young people to use alcohol, they can influence their friends to not use alcohol. Alcohol use is illegal for those under the legal drinking age, and excessive alcohol use or binge drinking by anyone of legal age is risky.
- **Parents.** Parents can set good examples by only using alcohol in moderation, preferably with meals, and never in risky situations, such as before operating a car or boat, or not using alcohol at all. Parents also should never permit underage drinking under any circumstances. Research shows that this may lead a young person to believe that s/he can drink even without Mom or Dad's permission. Finally, parents should never refer to alcohol use as a solution to stress or emotional problems.
- **Schools and college campuses.** Schools and college campuses can help foster a climate that encourages positive peer influence and reduces the harmful effects of illegal or irresponsible drinking. They can do so by first acknowledging the right of all students to a safe learning environment, then by allocating resources to the prevention of excessive or illegal alcohol use by students. All staff and faculty should be trained to identify and refer to the appropriate resource students who may be experiencing problems related to drinking. Many schools use their Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) for just such a purpose. And all students should have instruction on the physical, legal, social and psychological complications of alcohol or other drug use.
- **Communities.** Where possible, communities have drafted stiff penalties against retailers convicted of selling alcohol to minors. Other communities require keg alcohol tagging in the event a keg is discovered at an underage drinking party. Community groups, bound by a concern for public safety, have formed coalitions to draft community-wide approaches to illegal or irresponsible alcohol use among young people. Together, we can help prevent underage drinking.

Are You Codependent?

At one point or another, everyone exhibits some codependent behaviors. But for the codependent person, these behaviors are so deeply ingrained that they interfere significantly with their social or work lives. Codependence can make work and home life more challenging for you and your coworkers and/or loved ones.

Here are some typical symptoms of codependence.

- Codependents have trouble identifying their own needs and emotions.
- Codependents are easily influenced by what others say or do and by what others might be thinking or feeling.
- Codependents take on too much responsibility. Codependents let others tell them how to feel, dress and behave. They give in to others as opposed to standing up for their own needs.
- Codependents work hard to keep other people from being upset with them or disappointed in them. They may lie or distort the truth to avoid making others angry.
- Codependents judge themselves too harshly.
- Codependents confuse love with pity. They tend to love people they "pity" or can "rescue."

- Codependents feel obligated to take care of other people. They feel guilty when they ask for something for themselves. They give up their own wants and wishes to make other people happy. On the other hand, they try to control other people in order to get what they want without having to come right out and ask for it.
- Codependence does not have to be a lifelong condition. With the help of a professional counselor or self-help group, codependent people can learn to identify and express their emotions appropriately, to identify their own needs and take the steps necessary to fulfill them, and can learn to draw appropriate boundaries between themselves and others. In the end, you can learn to help yourself and help others, all in a healthy way.

Healthy Lunches, Healthy Minds: Economic Downturn Has Unexpected Effect

High unemployment rates and families' proactive efforts to save money have resulted in significantly more students eating lunch at school. According to *Saved by the Lunch Bell: As Economy Sinks, School Nutrition Program Participation Rises*, a report released in November 2008 by the School Nutrition Association, nationwide an average of 425,000 more students are participating in free and reduced school lunch programs.

More than three quarters of districts surveyed reported an increase in free school lunches provided, meaning the effects are being felt in districts across the country. Because the school-based child nutrition programs are entitlement programs, federal reimbursements will be provided to schools for each meal served; however, the amount of reimbursement provided continues to fall short of the actual costs associated with producing each school meal.

While the report is another indicator of grim economic news, SNA president Dr. Katie Wilson, SNS, emphasized that, "this year, when hunger is more common, more students are able to eat a balanced, nutritious meal at school." Meals served under the NSLP must meet nutrition guidelines based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, therefore no more than 30% of calories can come from fat and less than 10% from saturated fat. School lunches provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron, calcium and calories over the course of one week of menus.

What To Do If You Suspect Family Violence

Family violence has many forms, from verbal or emotional abuse to acts of physical abuse such as hitting or slapping. Therapists who work with abused family members say any means of maintaining power over another person is a form of abuse.

Abuse comes in many forms including: emotional abuse — using comments to lower a partner's self-esteem or to make him or her feel bad; using mind games; threats and intimidation — using fear to control; threatening to do harm to the children, others or him/herself; economic abuse — withholding money; keeping a partner from getting or keeping a job; sexual abuse — forced sexual contact, rape; physical assault — hitting, punching, beating, choking, pulling hair, kicking, burning, using weapons; and property destruction — breaking furniture or windows; damaging the car.

Though the subject may be difficult to bring up, typically, if you suspect abuse is occurring, you may be correct. Look for warning signs like unexplained bruises, cuts, and injuries or emotional effects such as unexplained crying/and or depression.

If someone you care about is a victim of abuse or a perpetrator of it and you want to offer assistance, find a safe, private place to talk honestly and openly. Share your concern for the person and encourage the individual to speak to someone who works with victims of domestic violence or abusers. If possible, give the person telephone numbers of agencies that can help.

For more information, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Other community agencies can also connect victims of abuse with the resources they need. If you suspect abuse and need help taking action, ask your student assistance program, counseling office, or other appropriate organization for help.

For more information regarding these or other topics, contact:

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