



# UPDATES FROM SCIP

December 2009

## Holiday Stress Affects Kids Too

The holidays can be very difficult for anyone touched by death, divorce, or other major family changes. This is especially true for kids and teens. They may have to split time between two households or spend time with new stepparents or siblings. There may be unfamiliar routines or painful reminders of the past. Many teens may feel empty because holidays are not the same as when they were young kids. There is also an extra focus on cheerfulness and family togetherness, or the pressure to live up to idealized images of holidays and family life. All of these can increase sadness and stress.

If your family has gone through a change recently, it is even more important to encourage your children to talk about their feelings. Let them know their feelings are normal. Remind them that, over time, things will get easier. But for now, they need all the support they can get. Give them permission to skip some activities that are too painful. Encourage them to spend time relaxing or doing an activity for themselves. Do something charitable; doing something for someone else can help change one's outlook and make you feel better. Exercise to work off stress. Cut down on sugar, which makes mood swings worse. You may even want to begin a new family tradition as a way of making a new start.

Additionally, if parents are feeling stressed, the children may pick up on it, so be sure to take care of yourself!

(Source: [www.health.ri.gov](http://www.health.ri.gov))

## Tips for Parents on Addressing Middle School-Aged Drinking



Children who begin drinking while they are in middle school or earlier usually have a wide variety of problems that last well into adulthood, including employment problems, abuse of other drugs, and committing criminal and violent acts before age 23. Various studies show almost 20% of 14 year-olds say they have been drunk at least once, one-fourth of 8th graders have reported being drunk, and three-quarters of 7th graders had used alcohol.

Members of The Science Inside Alcohol Project at American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) have developed five suggested steps parents can take to talk with their kids about alcohol:

**Find Teachable Moments** — We live in a culture of celebrity. If a celebrity your child admires admits to a drinking problem, or an instance of alcohol abuse occurs in your community, talk about it. Ask your middle school student if she knows anyone who drinks alcohol and whether it is at parties or has been brought into her school. Answer questions. Have this conversation often.

**Talk to Your Kids When Everything is Fine** — Middle school students are volatile, hormonal beings. They are sweet and wonderful one moment, and blow up the next. Pick a time when things are quiet and they're a captive audience such as in the backseat of your car. Don't take no for an answer.

**Engage Your Kids in the Science of Alcohol** — Adolescents are incredibly self-involved. Alcohol can cause memory loss, impair sports performance, incite embarrassing behavior and affect how they feel and look. Make them aware of these facts. If there is a history of alcoholism in your family, explain about genetic predispositions towards alcohol abuse.

**Be Vigilant** — There's no alternative to monitoring your kids. Have an early curfew. Know where they are at all times. Even if you are not home on a weeknight, make sure you can reach your kids by phone. Get to know their new friends and their parents. Find out what their rules and level of engagement are.

**Learn to Trust Your Child** — Now's the time when all the work you've put into creating a value system for your child begins to pay off. Set limits and enforce rules, but remember to give your child room to make his or her decisions, within your comfort zone. Praise them when they do well. It's worth a thousand words.

(Source: <http://alcoholism.about.com>; 09-22-09)

# Watch For Those "Hidden" Clues

## Drugs and Drug Use

Teens have a million clever ways to hide both their drugs and their drug use — inside a highlighter or tube of lipstick, stuffed into the back of a clock radio or hidden between a mattress and box springs — but the car is a big one. Kids hide it in the car because they don't think their parents will go through it.

Chris, now 24, says he would stash his drugs anywhere but in the house where his parents might find them — "Maybe in the garage, or under the hood of my car. We'd get pulled over and we wouldn't even be scared because you never see a cop open a hood on the side of the road."



Chris said he used to use a toilet paper tube lined with a dryer sheet to hide the smell of marijuana from his parents. He says, "All you have to do is blow out the smoke through there, and it scents the smoke so it doesn't smell like marijuana." But, he says, the best way to hide drug use was just to avoid his parents. "Cause I'd be high, and you know, I didn't want to give it away. So I would just come in, be like 'I'm home. I'll be upstairs in my room.'"

In the beginning stages teens are extremely good at being able to hide things: things like changing their clothes so they don't smell, and using Visine. It's important to address the issue of drugs with your child as early as possible. Experts say by the time parents catch kids using drugs, there's a good chance they're already addicted.

Chris, in rehab for more than a year, says he regrets the time he didn't spend with his parents, "My mom walks freely in and out of my room now. And it's like I just had so much to hide before, so I wouldn't let them in."

(Source: [www.connectwithkids.com](http://www.connectwithkids.com); 10-28-09)



**Your SCIP Coordinators wish you all a very happy, healthy, and safe holiday season!**

## Illiteracy

Chad, 18, remembers the embarrassment he felt in the 5th grade. "When I had to stand up in front of class or read out loud, for like, English, I couldn't do it," he says. Chad was reading at a 2nd grade level. Yet, year after year, he was promoted to the next grade. How did he do it? "[I] kind of, like, disappeared," he explains. "Went into the corner, I always kept my head down when we had to read."

One in 7 Americans...32 million...can't read, according to a new study released by the U.S. Department of Education. And some among those are hiding it from their family, friends and their teachers.

Kids are brilliant at hiding their illiteracy; keeping it a secret, experts say. Some poor readers will memorize stories that have been read to them. Others will be disruptive in class, or simply ask to leave. "Things like asking to get water, or asking to go to the bathroom, just things like that, because it's difficult for them," explains reading specialist LaSauna Johnson.

She says tactics like these are common in kids who can't read very well. "It's almost a strength that way, that they've gotten that far. It's a strength because they've been able to adapt and they've been able to use their strengths to apparently mask their deficiencies. But it's by all means an injustice, because it hasn't been caught by somebody in the educational system."

"You always found a way to get out of it, and you got further and further behind 'cause you weren't understanding what you were reading," states Chad. He says the pain and embarrassment of not being able to read is what finally made him get help.

Experts say the single most effective way to find out if a child is having trouble reading is to have them read out loud. Alternate reading paragraphs: you read one, then they read one. By doing this, you may recognize that they aren't reading very well.



(Source: [www.connectwithkids.com](http://www.connectwithkids.com); 11-04-09)