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CHEMICAL HEALTH TREND CORNER:

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Dear Parents:

It seems we are always in the midst of celebrating one thing or another – prom, graduation, end of the school year, summer, and more. This is good, but it can also be worrisome. We want to take this opportunity to remind you that as parents you have a particularly important role in shaping these events.

Please help keep your teen and his or her peers stay safe and alcohol-free.

Alcohol use is illegal by those in Minnesota who are under the age of 21 years. The only exception is that parents may provide alcohol to their own children in their own homes. Surveys of teens indicate that adults are teens' primary source of alcohol: at home, in bars and restaurants or on the street. To help reduce underage alcohol use, you can:

- Refuse to supply alcohol to underage young people when you host your own celebration. Do not buy a keg of beer for teens at a high school graduation or other party. This is illegal and it also invites young

people to drink illegally. Teen alcohol use is not a rite of passage into adulthood. In fact, alcohol has kept too many teens from becoming adults.

- Make sure that alcohol is not available at events your teen attends. Talk with other parents and party hosts to ensure alcohol-free celebrations. Be proactive. When parents stand together on this issue, they present a united front to teens.

- All law enforcement agencies within McLeod County are participating in the Zero Adult Provider program (ZAP). With this program law enforcement agencies will be actively investigating and prosecuting adults who provide alcohol to underage drinkers. Please take an active role in assisting us in protecting your child.

Remember that as a parent, you play an important role in preventing underage alcohol use. In research studies, teens say that their number one reason for refusing to drink alcohol is centered on worrying about what their parents would think. That is a powerful statement about the importance of your message and role modeling.

[Learn What You Can Do](#)



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WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?



“Nobody smokes marijuana anymore. Everyone’s vaping it. Or eating, drinking, sipping, dabbing, sucking on lozenges, chewing gum, applying unguents or administering a drop or two of a cannabis-infused tincture under one’s tongue, where it is absorbed into the sublingual artery, within minutes producing an invisible, odorless, private high.” “Marijuana start-ups are pushing the industry past smoke to products that make marijuana “convenient and ubiquitous.”

About That Joint: The Newest Marijuana Start-Ups Choices

When Eaze, a marijuana delivery service in the Bay Area and San Diego, started up in 2014, marijuana “flower,” the green plant material that people smoke, made up 85 percent of sales. Today, flower amounts to

less than one-third of sales. Last year, it was usurped by vape cartridges which heat marijuana oils that are inhaled. Eaze’s sales grew 300 percent. By the end of the year, it was doing more than 120,000 deliveries a month.

Another start-up in Oregon that makes vape cartridges says its sales grew from \$2 million in 2016 to \$7 million a month one year later.

An alcohol and marijuana analyst says pot “is gaining acceptance among all ages, ethnicities, and income groups, so much so that marijuana now poses a threat to the alcohol industry. She concludes, “Cannabis could be on the way to becoming the drug of choice for tomorrow’s America – a future in which lots of us get high, but no one smokes.”

Source: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids 2018, New York Times

Read the full New York Times story [here](#).



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“Our teens and Smartphones: Watching a trainwreck in motion”

Hutchinson Leader, Feb. 28, 2018 by
Rhoda Hubbard-Anderson

Several years ago, the always controversial and now publicly shamed comedian Louis C.K. was speaking to Conan O'Brien on why he wouldn't let his daughter have a cell phone. Among his reasons was the idea that cell phones are an artificial distraction for not having to experience negative emotion. I encourage my students to reach out when they are feeling sad, angry or lonely. However, I believe the point C.K. was making is that we deny ourselves the full and natural range of human emotion by avoiding feelings that *don't* feel good. Studies show experiencing and accepting negative emotions is vital to our mental health. Not only are bad feelings clues there may be something amiss in our life that needs attention, but accepting and working through these feelings can improve our ability to cope with stress and make us stronger and more resilient.

Another compelling study strikes at the heart of what many of us have been seeing for several years: a sharp increase in mental health

among our teens. From 2012 to 2015 the number of teens who presented classic signs of depression, feeling useless and joyless, rose 33%. The number of 13-18 year olds who committed suicide rose by 31%. Suicide among teen girls has reached a 40 year high. The corresponding culprit? Screen time. Kids who spent three hours or more a day on smartphones or other electronic devices were 34% more likely to feel hopeless or seriously consider suicide than kids who used devices two hours a day or less.

How much screen time *are* teens getting? With many schools moving to a BYOD initiative, some students are using their smartphones to conduct research, write papers and watch videos for homework. However, these uses are not factored into the staggering statistic that teens are using social media on average 9 hours a day. For those between the ages of 8 and 12, that average is nearly six hours per day.

Talk to an educator and they will tell you the smartphone struggle is real. And it's not just about distractions, focus and drama, although these are major concerns. Often in education, showing a cause and effect relationship with test scores is more impactful in affecting policy change. In a sinister experiment, a



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Cal State researcher took college students' phones away, under the ruse that the devices were interfering with laboratory measurements of stress, such as heart rate and sweating. The phones were left on, but placed out of reach of the students, who were reading a passage. Then the researchers began texting the students, who were forced to listen to the dings of their phones without being able to see the messages or respond. The result? Measurements of anxiety spiked, and reading comprehension dwindled.

Shortened attention span, inability to focus and lowered comprehension are not the worst of it. The effects of smartphone overuse on the brain is especially disturbing when we consider the rational part of the brain is not fully developed until the mid 20s. Or said this way, we have entrusted a device with the computing power it took to put a man on the moon to a person whose judgement, emotions and impulse control are still in the process of development. A recent study reported that anxiety levels in teens begin to rise after not having access to their phones after just ten minutes. Another finds 1 out of every 2 kids *themselves* say they are addicted to their cell phone. Perhaps it's time we look up. Even Apple has

announced that it's working on new ways to protect kids from smartphone addiction. The irony of this is not lost on some.

In a 60 Minutes piece on Silicon Valley, companies were found engineering their apps and social media to make them purposefully addicting. In the interview, an insider reveals how industry leaders are guilty of what is being called 'brain hacking'. For ease of understanding, brain hacking can be explained by picturing your smartphone as a slot machine. Programmers use algorithms connected to sounds, colors, levels and more, to make our brain feel a reward when we use their technology, thus 'hijacking' our brain and creating a need to continuously check our phone. This "programming of people" caused Tristan Harris, a former Google employee who found himself overwhelmed by the bombardment of technology in his own life, to write a 144 page paper that argued the constant distractions of apps and emails are weakening our relationships to each other and destroying our kids ability to focus. It was widely read inside Google, however, it did not lead to any changes and after three years he quit.



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Is this alarm sounding different than the cry of my grandparents that watching TV would rot my brain? Researchers say that it is. Why? Mostly due to the way the technology is being relayed and, because of the people who are using it most: our brilliant, emotional, social, insecure, vulnerable, developing kids.

Technology is not inherently good. Yet we enthusiastically embrace each new product that is rolled out and wonder in passive amazement at what miraculous times we live in. And we certainly do. However, the onus of teaching our children, even as we are on this new learning curve with them, is still on us. Boundaries help kids know they are safe. Our job as adults is to establish and enforce these boundaries even, and especially, when kids push back against them.

We are all witness to a world increasingly wired, yet more disconnected than ever. Instead of shaking our heads in stymied disbelief at silent groups hunkered down over their phones, thumbs blurred in frenzied texting, can we instead think about what kind of world we *do* want and what we can do to get there? We may not be able to change society as a whole, but we can impact our little corner.

In light of the growing need for mental health support in our schools, I would like to suggest that rethinking cell phones in schools might be a first step. For truly, the issue at hand is what it has always been about: relationships. Let's start *that* conversation.

Teen or Young Adult Drug Use: Using Positive Reinforcement to Help Change Behavior

Positive reinforcement means providing some kind of reward or benefit to increase the chances that a behavior will be repeated. And it is central to changing the way your son or daughter acts.

Positive Reinforcement: A Powerful Tool to Change Your Child's Behavior

Positive reinforcement is a motivating factor in all our lives, from a toddler who *ffff*feels encouraged by her parents' cheering to take her first steps, to an adult who collects a bonus or a tip for a job well done. We are more likely to repeat a behavior when it makes us feel good.

Substance use can also be reinforcing. For example, drugs or alcohol may help a person feel less



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anxious, alleviate boredom, encourage social interactions, help with insomnia, provide energy or help with weight management. In other words, because they “solve a problem” – although in an unhealthy way – the person is more likely to repeat the behavior of using drugs and alcohol.

As a parent or caregiver, you can use the same strategy to reinforce healthy, pro-social behaviors you want to see more of in your child. The following are some examples of positive behaviors you can reinforce or praise in your child:

- looking for a job
- being home on time
- helping with household chores
- speaking in a respectful way
- doing homework
- going to therapy appointments
- attending a support group meeting
- assisting another family member or friend with a problem
- returning phone calls/text messages promptly

You may be thinking, “Wait — these are things my child should do anyway, without any kind of reward.” But by rewarding your child’s good behavior, you are

helping to link a behavior you want to encourage with a positive outcome. Doing this repeatedly will help your child recognize that there is value in acting this way. Over time, he or she will learn that there are other ways to “feel good” besides using substances, which can lead to less substance use or even abstinence.

Your kindness and compassion will inspire a positive and warm feeling within your child and reinforce their belief that they are capable of feeling good from means other than using substances.

Examples of rewards or reinforcers that are free:

- a hug
- a smile
- a shoulder rub
- a thoughtful text message
- a kind word/compliment or praise.
- time spent together in a favorite activity like watching a movie, going fishing or playing chess.
- assisting with your child’s laundry or another chore
- teaching a skill like how to drive
- making a favorite breakfast, snack, dinner or dessert



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Examples of rewards or reinforcers that cost money:

- gift cards for a coffee shop, clothing store or restaurant
- small items like nail polish, makeup, hair product, socks or protein bars
- helping with healthcare costs (like the dentist and vision care/glasses), paying for a college class or
- textbooks or helping with credit standing
- concert or sports tickets

Why Do Teens Drink and Use Drugs?



Today's teens are growing up in an environment with pressures, stress and priorities vastly different from when we were their age. If you're concerned that your son or daughter might be using drugs or alcohol — or if you know they are — it's important that we, as parents,

consider why. Some teens turn to drugs and alcohol for a variety of reasons, like fitting in, socializing, experiencing life transitions, or dealing with emotional and psychological pain. Here's why it's important for you to recognize why kids might be drawn to substances and what you can do about it.

Keep in mind:

- Young brains are more vulnerable to drugs and alcohol. Research shows that the teen brain doesn't fully develop until 25. Drugs and alcohol can alter this development, potentially affecting brain structure and function.
- If there is a history of addiction in your family, if your child has mental health or behavioral issues, has suffered trauma or has impulse control problems, then your child has a much greater risk of developing a substance use problem. Be aware of these elevated risks and discuss it with your child regularly, as you would with any disease.