



# LAKE COUNTY NARCOTICS AGENCY

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P.L.U.S.<sup>2</sup>  
Parent's Guide  
Week #2  
Societal Expectations

This week's lesson engages the students in conversation about *societal expectations of youth use* of tobacco and alcohol. Societal expectations are discussed during class through what the students bring to class from last week's homework. We will take a look at some of the answers to the *societal expectations homework* regarding tobacco and alcohol.

What *societal expectations* do we have about tobacco use? Probably the first one we all think of today is "No smoking in public buildings." This expectation has become a law, which was established to protect those people who have made the choice not to smoke. Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS), also known as Secondhand Smoke, has been found to be extremely damaging to those who breathe it in. Children especially are affected by ETS for several reasons: 1) children breathe faster and therefore pass more oxygen (and contaminants) through his/her lungs. 2) Smoke floating in the air has cooled and therefore has become more dense. 3) Children don't have a good way to protect themselves from ETS (How do they get away from it?). 4) Children certainly don't have the authority, and often don't have the knowledge, to ask adults to please not smoke around them. So what's the conflicting message? Smoking shown in advertisements is portrayed as a group activity: people having fun, playing sports, in the great outdoors, in general *they look healthy*. Adults who smoke most often don't look at their use as really harmful to themselves. If they did it would make it somewhat easier to stop. Plus, when children see adults' doing something it is usually construed by children as being safe. The mixed message is "smoking and cigarette smoke is dangerous BUT cigarettes are legal, they look fun, and it's okay for adults: therefore it's okay".

Another *societal expectation* we have regarding youth smoking is that it's not okay to get caught, but it's often thought of as a *rite of passage* by adults. A young person hides his/her use because they know they are not allowed to smoke. It wasn't until March of 2001 that smoking by youth under the age of 18 became illegal in Ohio, yet for as long as I can remember young people have always been afraid to get caught. Why? It's very clear to youth that smoking is against the rules, that parents don't want their children to smoke. So where's the conflict? When youth do get caught by adults, who are not his/her parents, most of the time nothing happens. The youth's parents are not notified, the adult *might* say something but usually doesn't, the young person has just learned that the rule doesn't mean much to most adults. As adults we tend to view teenagers as being rebellious and not being able to stop them anyway. Is this a safe attitude with tobacco? Tobacco today contains much more nicotine and therefore is much more addictive. Youth begin to experiment with smoking at much younger ages (average age of initial onset is 10 years old) so by the time an adult catches the youth smoking, in most cases, the youth has already moved beyond experimentation of his/her use. As an adult we accept the youth's plea, "*It was the first time...honest.*", and so we see them as first time users. Did you know that 82% of all adult smokers started smoking prior to the age of 15! Did you know that 90 percent of all marijuana smokers *first* became smokers of tobacco?

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What about alcohol? What are the *societal expectations* we hold around this drug? Can we have a celebration without alcohol? Can we go to a party, reception, recognition, sporting event, theater production, orchestra or recital, camping trip, picnic, boating/fishing, skiing, a quiet evening alone, a motorcycle/car rally, a ..... without alcohol being present? Alcohol has become a part of just about everything we do. Yet we expect youth to abstain or *use alcohol responsibly* when they participate in all of those above-mentioned events.

We talk about *responsible use* of alcohol. A drug, which is so toxic to the body that the liver will not filter any thing except alcohol until all of the alcohol is gone from the body; A drug, which is responsible for over 80% of the reported rapes; A drug, which severely impairs ones ability to use good judgment and sound reasoning; A drug, which is reported to be associated with 49% of suicides by youth 15-18 years of age. As a society we have defined *responsible use* as "don't drink and drive", "know your limit", "leave your keys at the door", and "as long as you and your friends are drinking here at home I'll know where you are." Maybe you've heard some of these. There is no doubt that drinking and driving is very dangerous, deadly and irresponsible. We have created "designated drivers" in an attempt to save lives among our youth. But, did you know that research on designated drivers has clearly shown that for every designated driver there are *3 designated drinkers created*. What about the concept of "know your limit"? How does one learn their limit? Think about it...you learn your limit with alcohol by going past it. Alcohol is a drug, which sets the user up to do irresponsible things. How can one use a drug like this *responsibly*? There is no question that designated drivers have saved lives, but they have also created designated drinkers, which has cost lives, ruined lives, and created some very young parents.

As a culture we have sent a very clear message to our youth ".....alcohol is okay, just know when to say no." It's no wonder that some adults allow youth to drink in their home as long as they (the youth) check their keys at the door. "I mean....we can't stop them anyway....", "let's at least keep them safe while they drink....", "how can I tell them no when I drink?" We don't want to be hypocritical, do we? What's the alternate message we send...."laws are made to be broken", "just don't get caught", "....drinking is only bad IF you drive", "....learn how to control your use of a dangerous drug"; *Youth interpretation*: "I can control my use of all drugs", "it's okay to break the law *a little bit*", "alcohol only hurts you if you crash." I wonder if any of this has anything to do with the drug problem, including alcohol, our youth are facing today?

### **Student/Parent Homework this week:**

The students are to find general information about the dangers of tobacco and alcohol use which they will use during a *Jeopardy game* presented during class. The categories being used will be: "Just the Facts" and "50/50". If your child has access to the Internet here are some web sites that can be helpful: *theantidrug.com; kidshealth.org; jointogether.org; thetruth.com; drugfree.org; ohiolung.org; ncadd.org; nida.nih.gov; abovetheinfluence.com*. As your child looks for information to use during the jeopardy game I am sure they will gather some great information way beyond the scope of what will be needed. That will be a good thing. The more information our kids have the better chance they will have in making good, positive decisions.

The students have been asked to begin to collect clippings, printed statements, and general information, etc. on *the Effects of Alcohol, or Tobacco on Youth in Our Society*. These clippings will be used in a later class to prepare posters to display around the school.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Officer Willis at the  
Lake County Narcotics Agency, phone 440-350-3302.