

Are the Children Well?

What Does Our Data Tell Us?



A dynamic, engaging community conversation took place on November 2nd, sponsored by The Coalition, a program of Tri-Town Council (TTC).

Over 50 community members representing families, schools, law enforcement and health joined TTC at November's Community Conversation. We explored the social and emotional well being of tri-town youth based on the results of the 2014 Masconomet Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and 2015 Adult Perception Survey (APS). Topics ranged from stress and mental health to substance use and perceptions.

Data shows that while 60% of middle school and 80% of high school youth report stress as a problem "sometimes, often or always", most youth report having positive stress management

techniques like physical activity, creative pursuits, and talking to family and friends. (In fact, talking to a parent/family member was the top stress management strategy for middle schoolers!) This data reinforces that despite what your kids may say (or the eye rolling) parents are very important to our kids!

Conversations with our kids matter; together we can help them effectively manage stress.

Middle School rates of 30 day substance use are extremely low (>1%), and rates of use among high school youth have fallen or held steady since 2012. *(The data showed that participation in substance use increases with age.)*

According to national statistics, e-cigarette use rates are steadily climbing, tripling among middle and high school youth from 2013

to 2014. **Data shows that Masco e-cig use rates are 4.6% (MS) and 29% (HS);** there is evidence that e-cigarette use can lead to smoking cigarettes. Dr. Neil Meehan of Boxford, expressed concern that e-cigarette use has the potential to **undo the success of tobacco prevention** efforts over the past 30 years. Fortunately, a national poll reports 75% of teens and parents believe that e-cigs should be restricted in public spaces, come with health warnings, and that candy/fruit flavored cigarettes should be banned. That parents and teens are in such strong agreement shows **both groups are concerned about the health risks of e-cigarettes.**

The evening concluded with a discussion about **peer and adult perceptions of youth.** The 2014 YRBS data showed that while more middle school youth are accurately perceiving peer behavior—most correctly perceive their peers are **not** using alcohol, tobacco and marijuana—**significant misperceptions exist** among Masco high school youth. The APS data also shows that many adults in the tri-town misperceive youth substance use.

Why are perceptions important? Read on to find out!

Why PERCEPTIONS Matter!

Norms are the actual behaviors and attitudes of the majority of people in a community. **What most do is the norm.** Perceived norms are people's beliefs about the norms of their peers. Social Norms theory is based on the idea that **people's choices are largely influenced by what they perceive others are doing, thinking and feeling.** These perceptions form the basis of what people consider to be "normal" or "typical" behaviors.

Concerns arise when the perceptions of normal behaviors do not reflect reality. These misperceptions can create pressure to engage in risky behaviors because the belief is that "everyone else is doing it." If people believe that risky behaviors are typical, some individuals are more likely to engage in those behaviors for several reasons. First, people may be more likely to take part in a high risk activity if they misperceive it as the norm. Second,

those who regularly engage in high risk activities often do so with others and therefore believe "everyone" does it. And third, if a bystander believes the risky behavior is the norm, they may fear social disapproval for intervening and therefore be reluctant to intervene to stop the dangerous behavior.

Based on the YRBS results, we know that "everyone is NOT doing it"! If we decrease the **perception** of use, then we will decrease **actual** use.

December 2015

Did you know...

- **7 OUT OF 10** MASCO HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH AND **99%** OF MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH CHOOSE **NOT** TO DRINK ALCOHOL
- **MOST (8 OUT OF 10)** MASCO HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH AND **ALMOST ALL (99%)** MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH CHOOSE **NOT** TO SMOKE MARIJUANA
- **MOST** MASCO YOUTH (**90+%**) SAY THEY HAVE A CARING ADULT THEY CAN TALK WITH ABOUT THINGS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THEM.

Closing the Gap...

According to the most recent YRBS survey, more middle school youth are **accurately** perceiving their peers are **NOT** using substances—a big change over 2012!

Perception gaps are closing among our middle school youth—let's **continue to promote those positive "most of us" behaviors!**

PARENTS are the LEADING INFLUENCE on TEENS!

According to the 2015 GFK Roper Youth Report, parents continue to be the leading influence on 13—17 year olds' decisions about drinking. The report shows that parents' influence on their teens has risen steadily over the last 20 years, showing a 24% increase since 1991. The influence of parents is **significantly higher** than that of siblings, friends, and the media.

A survey by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) found too that parents do have an influence on teens' decisions about

drinking. Teens are much less likely to drink if their parents tell them underage drinking is completely unacceptable. **Teens whose parents told them underage drinking is completely unacceptable are 80% less likely to drink,** compared with those whose parents give their teens' other messages about drinking, the survey found.

"Decades of research show that there is no safe way to 'teach' teens how to drink responsibly," Robert Turrisi, a

professor and researcher at Pennsylvania State University, said in a [MADD news release](#). "A clear no-use message is the most effective way for parents to help keep teens safe from the many dangers associated with underage alcohol use. This issue is too important to leave to chance and hope for the best."



"THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS IS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN THAT OF SIBLINGS, FRIENDS, AND THE MEDIA."

PARENTS MATTER!

- ▶ MOST Masco middle school youth **believe** their parents **disapprove** of alcohol and pot use.
- ▶ 80+% of Masco 9—12th graders **KNOW** their parents **disapprove** of underage drinking and marijuana use.
- ▶ **Parents are not ALONE...**
- ▶ **98%** of Masco middle school parents and **93%** of Masco high school parents **disapprove** of youth substance use.
- ▶ **8 out of 10** parents believe drinking is **NEVER** a good thing for youth under 21

CHANGING THE CHATTER

MOST Masco Youth are NOT Using Drugs & Alcohol!

"Change starts with me. I can work at home. I have to take the information home. Then it spreads."

Ken Lidden
Community Member
ABT Yoga

Perception is everything in the teen years. It's a time when many young people want to fit in and often take chances based on what "everybody else" is doing. When it comes to drugs and alcohol, studies show young people drastically overestimate use among their peers. (And the 2014 Masco YRBS and 2015 Tri-Town APS support that finding!)

"You've never had a kid come to school on Monday saying, 'Great weekend! I was so raging sober!'

says Renee Soulis, a 30 year veteran of FCD Educational Services based in Newton, MA. Soulis explains, "Instead, young kids hear all about the ones who are drinking and this drives everything." Soulis adds, "**The more use kids think that there is, the more use there will be. These false perceptions greatly increase risks.** Students are making decisions based on incorrect data and this data gets reinforced multiple times a day." Soulis continues, "So much of

our time and focus is spent on the kids who are in trouble. We never talk about the healthy population."

To correct these misperceptions it is important to use real data. **The Masco 2014 YRBS is the data source that highlights that most Masco youth are not using.** So, next time you hear someone saying that "everybody is doing it" you might just want to show them the data that proves otherwise.

2014 Masco Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Results: 30 Day NON-Use Rates

Substance:	Percent of NON-users (Middle School)	Percent of NON-Users (High School)
Alcohol	98.9%	70%
Cigarettes	99.5%	94%
Marijuana	99.3%	78%

Validate the healthy choices youth make! Help them understand that they are in the **majority** and are **NOT alone** when they choose to be drug and alcohol free!

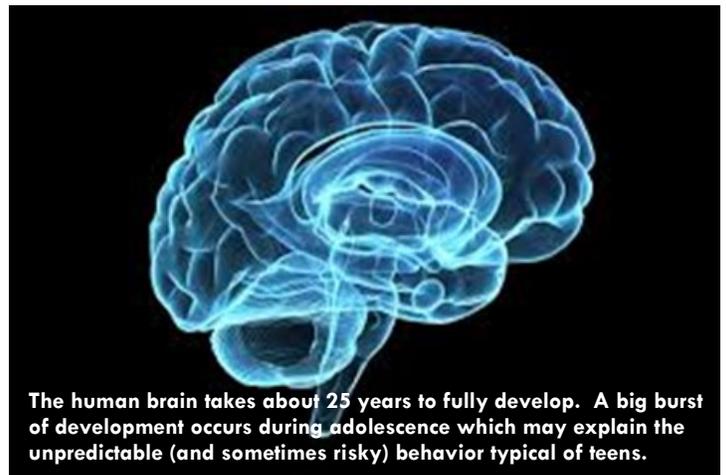
What can PARENTS do to PREVENT drug and alcohol abuse?

Excerpted from: www.hazeldenbettyford.org/

It's a FACT!

According to the Partnership for Drug-Free kids, teens who learn about the dangers and risks of drugs from their parents are **50% less likely to use drugs**

- ◆ **Model** healthy behavior.
- ◆ Promote the norm that **most** youth are not using alcohol or drugs.
- ◆ **Talk early and often** about alcohol and drug use.
- ◆ Discuss ways to avoid **uncomfortable situations**. Practice refusal skills through role play.
- ◆ **Establish a safety plan** if your child is ever in an unsafe situation.
- ◆ Use **teachable moments** to give your child accurate information about alcohol and other drugs.
- ◆ Clearly and often **tell your child your expectations** they not use alcohol and drugs.
- ◆ Set a **reasonable time** for your child to be home. Be awake and interact with them when they come home.
- ◆ Offer your children a safe ride home if they call.



- ◆ Get to know your child's friends. Share with them your **expectations** about not using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- ◆ **Develop a "hotline"** of communication among adults.
- ◆ **Know where your child** is going. If attending a party, talk to the host's parents and gauge what degree they are going to be involved and onsite.
- ◆ **Establish consequences** for alcohol or other substance use.
- ◆ **Tell your son/daughter in advance you will be checking up** — and do it! Make sure they are where they say they are.
- ◆ **Reduce accessibility** to alcohol and safeguard medications around your home.
- ◆ **Dispose** of unused medications safely and quickly.

Balancing Hope and Concern: Resources



While substance use and abuse among Masco youth is not prevalent —most kids choose NOT to use - **education and communication are the keys to prevention!**

Click on the following links for more information.

- ▶ www.drugfree.org/the-parent-toolkit/
- ▶ thecoolspot.gov/
- ▶ www.rehabs.com/pro-talk-articles/busting-the-worst-myths-about-teens-and-substance-use/
- ▶ www.drugabuse.gov/publications/marijuana-facts-parents-need-to-know/talking-to-your-kids-communicating-risks



- ▶ www.drugabuse.gov/publications/marijuana-facts-teens/some-things-to-think-about
- ▶ www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/preventingdruguse_2.pdf
- ▶ <http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking>



The mission of **Tri-Town Council (TTC)** is to reduce and prevent at-risk behavior and to strengthen the social and emotional well being of tri-town youth. Collaborating with parents, schools, youth, law enforcement, community organizations and area resources, TTC identifies needs and provides proactive solutions that support and empower youth to make healthy and safe decisions. Through our youth workshops, adult education programs, after-school enrichment and sponsored programs, we reach thousands of youth (K-12) parents, and educators each year.



The Coalition, a program of Tri-Town Council, is a community partnership focused on achieving a measurable reduction in youth drug and alcohol use by establishing and maintaining an environment in which youth of all ages are encouraged and choose to be substance-free. As a community we promote open dialogue, education around healthy choices, and coordination of appropriate resources.

The complete summaries of the YRBS and Adult Perception Survey results can be found at:

<http://www.tritowncouncil.org/coalition-3/news-and-articles/>

Thank you Community Conversation SUPPORTERS!



Supporter Ken Lidden of ABT Yoga talks with Tim and Lisa McSweeney of Topsfield.

Many community supporters joined in the discussion representing public health, school administration, mental health, health and wellness, law enforcement and the faith community.
Thank you!

Pastor Larry Schell
Middleton Congregational Church
Ken Lidden
ABT Yoga
Donna Davis LMHC

Lt. Jim Riter
Boxford Police Department
Sharon Stewart
Tri Town School Union
Karen Trevenen
Masconomet High School Nurse
Neil Meehan M.D.
Lawrence General Hospital
Terry Sievers R.N.
Lawrence General Hospital

Healthy Kids = Healthy Communities

The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets will help our children grow! They are the fundamental building blocks of healthy social and emotional development. Assets are both **external** (resources, relationships and activities) that promote a positive environment for kids, and **internal** (values, skills, and beliefs) that young people need to develop so they can engage in the world around them and make safe and positive choices! Simply put, kids need these "developmental nutrients" - internal strengths and external supports- so that they can grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

Assets? What DIFFERENCE do Assets make?

Search Institute scientists have been collecting data about youth assets for years. But, instead of asking the question, which asset is the most important, they asked instead, do the number of assets a youth has make a difference? Not surprisingly, the answer is a resounding YES! Data consistently shows that kids - regardless of race, gender, socioeconomics and geographic location - who have fewer Assets are more likely to engage in risky behaviors like substance use and violence. However, kids with a high number of assets are much more likely to make healthy choices and do well in school! Assets have the power to **PROTECT** young people from risk behaviors, and Assets have the power to **PROMOTE** healthy, thriving behaviors in our kids. **MORE IS BETTER!** The more of these positive experiences children have in their lives, the greater the likelihood that they will succeed developmentally.

THE POWER OF US!

Building Assets isn't just about having great families, schools, and neighborhoods. It's about each one of us choosing to play a role in the raising of our kids. Most Assets are built through caring relationships, and community resources like schools, libraries, congregations, and community centers can provide a setting where lasting, caring relationships can begin to form between and among adults, teens, and kids. AND Asset building can happen at any age, anywhere, and anytime! Let us not forget that we all have something to offer young people, and in return we all will reap the rewards of a strong, vibrant, healthy community!

More information about the 40 Assets and Asset Building can be found at: www.search-institute.org or www.tritowncouncil.org/developmental-assets/

And a very special thank you to Coalition members Stephanie Meegan and Kelly Smith for helping us plan the evening!