May 2019

At the Heart of Wellness

Message from Maria

How Harmful is it Really?

Many parents and teens have become increasingly ambivalent about marijuana use. This ambivalence is often based on long held beliefs and misconceptions that marijuana is safer than alcohol and other drugs. In our prevention work, we look at the contributing factors that drive decisions. One is a concept termed ‘perception of harm’. Very simply, it is defined as how harmful a person deems a particular behavior to be. The higher the perception of harm, the less likely a person is to engage in the behavior, and vice versa. In the last decade, perception of harm regarding marijuana use has decreased substantially, while incidence of use among young people has increased. Cultural shifts, the rise of medical marijuana and legalization efforts throughout the country play a role in that perception.

So, how concerned should we be about this trend? And, if you’re a parent you may be asking yourself, what should I do? It can be confusing given all of the contradictory information out there. We’re focusing on a few important factors that community members can impact and providing links to reputable sources. Recent research shows that teen brains are more vulnerable to the effects of marijuana than alcohol. Another recent study out of the University of Philadelphia shows that “young people who used marijuana frequently were more likely than nonusers to have slightly lower scores on tests of memory, learning new information, and higher-level problem solving and information processing”. While marijuana is not acutely lethal like other well-known drugs like opioids, there are real risks associate with use, as with any other substance, legal or not. Notably, there is an increase in potency that today’s marijuana contains and some of the health risks associated with “today’s” marijuana that you can learn more about in this article found on NPR. Talk to your teen and help dispel some of the common myths about marijuana and other substances, this link can help guide your conversation.

Join or attend a community prevention coalition. At McCall we lead four community coalitions, covering more than 14 towns across northwest Connecticut. In these prevention coalitions, McCall engages key stakeholders from every sector of the community to collaboratively address issues affecting young people, including drug and alcohol use. McCall has been at the forefront of bringing stakeholders together for more than a decade with significant and measurable results, with the goal of changing norms to create a better and safer
In the words of a friend and Task Force member; “marijuana isn’t kale”.

So, where does that leave us? I think the conversation needs to be focused in two places. One; our culture is in a great deal of pain collectively. I’ll explain. According to the Pew Charitable Trust, we spend about $550 billion dollars a year in the US alone on prescription drugs. The top ten prescribed drugs are primarily for pain, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Americans are sick and uncomfortable, and we want relief, FAST. There’s been a great deal of research into why this is. The answers from where I sit go right back to the root causes of addiction that we frequently discuss here. Unresolved trauma and disconnection – from one another, from meaningful work, from a sense of agency over our lives – leads to pain. And, when we get to the stage where we can’t cope, we drop out of the pain of our lives and lo and behold, we find (temporary) relief.

But, what’s the big deal? A little relief from pain and suffering sounds like a good thing, right? And if marijuana provides that without any of the major issues that other, more powerful substances bring, it’s okay, right? Well – here’s where I take issue with that. Every time we place for young people. Coalitions also help to shape policy by working closely with local and state government and can advocate for any revenue from the sale of marijuana to be directed toward to education, prevention programs and addiction treatment.

The well-being of our community members, especially our youth, is an important first step in reducing the negative impact of marijuana and building connected, resilient youth in our communities. If you would like to learn more about community coalitions please click here or call our prevention department at 860-496-2100.

When pain knocks on the door – wise ones breathe deep and say:

“Come in.
Sit down with me.
And don't leave until you've taught me what I need to know.”

MOMASTERY

McCall’s Heart

The McCall Center for Behavioral Health is fortunate to have a remarkable group of employees who are dedicated to our clients, our community and our agency. Beginning this month, and continuing throughout the year, we will be featuring a staff member. We know how amazing our staff is and we think it is important for you, our readers, to get to know a little bit about them as well. For McCall employees this is not just a job, they love this agency, believe in its mission, have hope for their clients (even when those clients feel lost and hopeless) and know that their work is critically important to turn the tide of the ravages of addiction toward the journey of health. Our employees are the heart of McCall. This month we are featuring Angel Santiago.
opt out of life, we miss the lesson. Glennon Doyle says; “Pain is a traveling professor. Pain knocks & the wise say: Come in—sit with me. Teach me what I must know. First the pain, then the rising.”

The other important part of this conversation needs to be on building resiliency in our kids. The article this month focuses on that and the critical factor called ‘age of first use’. In prevention, we pay special attention to that because 1) it’s something kids and families have a good deal of control over, and 2) according to the latest neuroscience research, a fully developed brain - which happens after the age of 21 – is much less likely to develop a psychological dependence on a mind-altering substance. In other words – kids shouldn’t smoke marijuana. Period. It’s NOT harmless to a developing brain.

Legal or illegal, let’s be sure we’re having the most important conversations in our homes and communities. We are all faced with choices to use legal substances designed to numb us every day. Equipped with resilience and connections, they don’t have the power over us that they do when we are vulnerable.

All my best to you always,

Hometown: Torrington, Connecticut
Position: Mat recovery support specialist, tech
My favorite quote: progress not perfection
My mantra has always been, When I do something I always give my all.
What I love about my job.
I love my job because I get to be part of a team where everyone shares the same vision of putting an end to the stigmas associated with addiction. My job allows me to aide in bettering the lives of people struggling addiction.

Make a difference in someone's life and support McCall today.

Our mission is to provide comprehensive integrated substance abuse and mental health treatment to help people lead healthier and more productive lives.

Your donation will directly support our prevention, recovery and community programs and help us provide clients with the support they need-regardless of
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their ability to pay. Click here to donate today!