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Science Helping Parents Confront Youth Drug Use and Abuse: New Web Resource Helps Parents Grasp Teen Behavior and Connect with their Kids

Treatment Research Institute provides the Science behind Engaging, Interactive Resource Developed by the Partnership for a Drug Free America

Philadelphia; June 11, 2008: Fostering the parent-teen connection just got easier with release of “*A Parent’s Guide to the Teen Brain*,” a digital, science-based resource for parents that explains adolescent brain processes and offers tips for communicating and helping teens make good decisions.

Available now at the web site of the Partnership for a Drug Free America, www.drugfree.org/teenbrain, “*A Parent’s Guide to the Teen Brain*” brings to life research showing that the brain is not fully developed until about age 25. With video, humorous interactive segments, role-playing and advice from experts, parents learn that ongoing brain development contributes to the vexing teen behaviors that confound and often put parents off - impulsiveness, rebellion, high emotions, questionable judgment and risk-taking. The resource also includes tips to help parents establish (or re-create) the parent-teen relationship so essential to guiding teens through any one of the number of challenges they face, alcohol and drug temptations included.

The product was developed by the Partnership for a Drug Free America (“Partnership”) in collaboration with Boston-based WGBH, leaders in public broadcasting and educational multimedia, with the Philadelphia-based Treatment Research Institute supplying science guidance.

“Brain development can explain many of the teen behaviors that can lead parents to assume kids no longer need their guidance or wouldn’t be receptive,” said Ken Winters, Ph.D. of the Treatment Research Institute who led the science development team for the product. “And the choices and actions of teenagers can powerfully direct the development of their own brains,” he added.

“In fact, no matter how mature teens may look and sound, parents need to understand that the teenager is still ‘a work in progress’ when it comes to good decision making,” according to A. Thomas McLellan, Ph.D., chief executive of the Treatment Research Institute. “Developmental science tells us adolescence is the period when critical decisions are being made by a brain that is over sensitive to emotional influence and under prepared for judgment and behavioral control,” he added.

“Parents report feeling a loss of power and growing need for help and support as teens hit the years where they are most at risk for drug and alcohol use,” said Steve Pasierb, Partnership President and CEO. As evidence, he pointed to results of the most recent Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), a survey of parents’ attitudes about drugs and alcohol, that showed an increase in the number of parents reporting loss of confidence in their ability to influence their kids’ decision to use drugs as teens mature into adolescence – 25% of fifth grade parents reporting little influence compared to 47% of parents with tenth graders.

The PATS data, from 2007, also revealed an increase in the number of parents expressing need for more tools and information to help their kids deal with drugs and alcohol. Fifty-one percent of eighth grade parents expressed such a need compared to 35% of parents whose children are in fifth grade.

“It’s natural for parents to be frustrated by teens’ behavior, but it must not discourage them from talking about these important issues. This new web resource was created to encourage parents to learn what’s really going on inside a teen’s mind, and how to step in to help teens make good decisions they’re not ready to make on their own, whether it’s about drugs and alcohol, friends, sex or any other issue teens face today,” Pasierb said.

Partnership research historically shows that kids who report learning about drugs from their parents are 50% less likely to use, but only about three out of ten kids report having talked with parents on the subject. Also, “disappointing my parents” is frequently cited by teenagers as a reason why they don’t experiment or use drugs frequently, a statistic parents should heed according to McLellan. “Kids may act like they don’t care or don’t need guidance, but the data say otherwise,” he said.

“*A Parent’s Guide to the Teen Brain*” is the first of several resources aimed at parents to be developed by the Partnership with science guidance from the Treatment Research Institute. As a building block tool, the Parent’s Guide provides essential knowledge parents need to establish the “talking” connection to help teens navigate any problem of adolescence. Future products will specifically target drugs and alcohol and will aim to address parent needs at various levels of experience with substance abuse and their children.

The Treatment Research Institute is a non-profit research and development group specializing in science-driven reform of policy and practice in addiction and substance use.