

Teen Hook-up Culture: From Alphacyberpals to Zubas*

Campus Outreach Founder Katie Koestner Exposes a “Cyber World of Trouble”

BY SALLY SHERWOOD

Those who understand every word in the title of this article may be among the minority of Internet-savvy individuals over the age of 19. According to Katie Koestner, nationally recognized expert on student safety and teen relationship culture, what we think vs. what we actually know about the myriad layers of cyberspace may prove daunting to us in our roles

Most adults don't grasp the scope and impact of these changes on society, in general, and on our youth, in particular.

as parents and educators. However, what we don't understand about this universally accessible world can endanger the lives of our children unless we are willing to educate ourselves about the Internet, its denizens and its victims. Ms. Koestner delivered a wake-up call at the September 30 luncheon for PIA school reps and for those unable to attend, the following synopsis of her presentation will sound the alarm.

Remember the cozy lure of “Reach Out and Touch Someone,” or the celebratory declaration that “We're All Connected”? Those catchy slogans, delivered to us by our local and long-distance phone companies, evoke an era not long ago when Ma Bell connected us with that special someone. Nothing invaded the privacy of those calls but a party line, eavesdropper or government-issued wiretap. However, in the last decade and a half, the telecommunications industry has revolutionized the ways and means by which we connect.

The ubiquitous power of the Internet and the cell phone have added to our vernacular such terms as instant messaging, texting, sexting, chatrooms,

Twittering, Skyping, social networking, live chat, and photo buckets, to name but a few. What most adults don't grasp, said Ms. Koestner, are the scope and impact of these changes on society, in general, and on our youth, in particular. She suggested parents ask themselves: How many strangers in the guise of friends are privileged witnesses to every online thought of our children? How many secretly recorded conversations or videos are being distributed en masse through cyberspace? Recent news reports tell only part of the story.

To gauge the cyberspace awareness of her audience, Koestner asked how many parents had purchased cell phones for their children, and whether they thought their children used the phones for Internet access, text messaging, or capturing or sending images. She asked parents to assess their own facility with devices, applications and cyber-related software, noting that while parents might know the basics of e-mailing,

TIPS FOR PARENTS: STAY IN CONTROL

Parents should know that cell phones can be configured to set and/or control:

- Multiple GPS checkpoints
- Text message volume
- Alarm warnings when a car exceeds the speed limit
- Text messaging, when the child is driving over a given mph
- Webcams to prevent sending images to friends

Every URL is saved and catalogued as it changes over time. Archive.org is a free open-to-the-public time machine for the World Wide Web. Entering a company name or personal home page and “Take Me Back” yields an image of every home page and its permutations since the 1996 universal accessibility of the Internet.

*Consult urbanictionary.com and learn more

TEEN HOOK-UP CULTURE CONTINUED

social networking and photo uploading, they may not know that their children could access unsavory, even dangerous, sites with Vtunnels; or that their sons could engage in online gaming, selling their avatars on eBay to raise money for college; or that these kids could hide inappropriate material on the Xbox instead of the home computer hard drive.

Koestner offered documented scenarios for parents to contemplate, such as the slumber party where kids shoot photos of home furnishings and security systems that may be instantly uploaded to YouTube for the edification of potential thugs. A child may transmit online details of the family's vacation itinerary that can lead a predator to an empty home. Students may post Facebook data informing an online audience of every detail of college life, from dorm suite number to class schedule, which may attract a miscreant to an empty room. We have read all too recently of secretly captured and uploaded video images of young victims that have led to psychological damage, even suicide.

Know the Cyberterrain

As we consider the challenge of 21st century parenting skills, Koestner suggests that parents become intimately familiar with the panoply of Web-based offerings that are available, accessible and actively engaging children, from early years through young adulthood. Family-friendly sites are teaching children to gamble. Disney's children's social network, Club Penguin, can encourage addiction, bullying and exclusivity when children use animals as avatars and "friend" each other. The Webkins gaming site, with its inflated cash values, may distort a child's perceptions of the real-world value of money. Explore these sites in depth on the World Wide Web: Reputation Defender, Twitterfeed, Archive.org, Urban Dictionary, Spokeo, Club Penguin, MySpace, Facebook (Jake the Fake, Pinup Girl, Spank Me, Have Sex, Kinky Poke, Hot or Not, et. al.), Camtasia.

Koestner urged parents to take stock of their children's online devices and activity, and to firmly explain the permanent consequences of "pushing a single button. Send and Enter are permanent, checkable, traceable and retrievable at all times." The originating device can be identified, as can the path of the communication. The sender(s) can irrevocably harm the victims, even unintentionally.

Responsible parents must be familiar with the world in which their children are engaged and with all the ramifications of irresponsible Internet behavior.

Ms. Koestner's array of cyber cases highlights the need for parents to perform their own update of digital knowledge. The cases illustrate a brave new world unanticipated and foreign to a generation who came of age pushing a button to receive only — from TVs to word processors. Pushing a button today, said Koestner, generates real-time responses, uploads, mass distribution and potentially damaged reputations and lives.

Ms. Koestner provided parenting tips on everything from console game purchases to parental control options on digital devices. Intangible, changeable and universally accessible, our children's online activities are difficult to monitor. Kids may perform several tasks at once, clicking through to multiple levels of windows in a "dynamic interface," as Ms. Koestner described today's Internet experience. Someone at the other end of the connection can observe your child's Internet behavior, Koestner warned, making it simple for an online pornographer to detect the misspellings of a five-year-old.

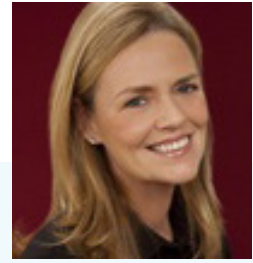
Responsible parents must be familiar with the world in which their children are engaged and with all the ramifications of irresponsible Internet behavior. Ms. Koestner noted that "parenting skills in cyberspace are different from what they used to be." Teaching kids the concept of cyberspace transparency and authenticity is tantamount to warning them not to

TEEN HOOK-UP CULTURE CONTINUED

talk to strangers, she said. Every word they type and enter becomes a permanent record for which they are responsible. Young children may not connect themselves with their online identity, and Koestner reminds us it is our job to help them reconnect with themselves, using the same persona for every application to ensure continuity, responsibility and identity. •

A featured expert appearing in such respected media outlets as The New York Times, The LA Times, Time, The Journal of Higher Education, NBC Nightly News, MSNBC, Larry King Live, The Oprah Winfrey Show; the subject of HBO Lifestories Docudrama, “No Visible Bruises: The Katie Koestner Story”; Capitol Hill witness; and college, high school and parent group speaker, Katie Koestner founded Campus Outreach Services to raise popular awareness and encourage proactive efforts to counter the dangers of sexual assault. Visit www.campusoutreachservices.com and educate yourself, your child and your peers about the realities of the cyberspace community. The organization provides a host of practical resources, including DVDs and a 450-page encyclopedia of technology for parents.

PRESIDENT'S **Letter**



Feeling Connected

Today is SSAT Saturday and my son is running out the door clutching his two #2 pencils and admission ticket. “Do you know where to go?” I shout, knowing full well that I have given him the address. “Mom, I’ll just follow all the kids heading over,” he retorts. In some way I am comforted—he’s with a crowd. This morning, all over the City, eighth graders from independent schools are making their way to test centers to put their best feet forward, to “SWYK” (show what you know.) It’s a shared experience, a common bond for these teens in every borough. It doesn’t so much matter that they are really competing with each other. They all have a connection.

My friends from other towns outside our tri-state area don’t fully comprehend the reasons my husband and I have decided to raise our children in New York City. Neither of us are natives of New York and our kids love the outdoors and sporting life—two things in short supply on our little 23-square-mile island. “Why,” they ask, are you doing your children a “disservice” by raising them in such a large city? These words ring in my head, particularly as my son learns the hard lesson of packaging himself for the next step in his educational experience—high school. We live here because it’s a great community and we are, on a very basic level, linked simply by our collective decisions to live here. We are connected.

New York is a huge city—not only diverse but disparate. From the outside looking in, it’s easy to understand why my friends would see no cohesion at all. But if one breaks down this teeming mass of people, smaller groups to which we all belong make life bearable and, actually, often quite intimate. Neighborhoods, schools, churches and clubs all slice the Big Apple into bite-size chunks that are easier to swallow. Through these, we become more closely acquainted, and through our connections, a support system is created, not only for ourselves but also for our children. We are all going through the growing up process together. And, that means our link is vital.

But just belonging to these various groups or being part of these communities isn’t the whole story. Beyond the connection, there is a culture of communication here—people talk to people. Not just in the “how are you today way,” but really T-A-L-K to one another. Although we might complain about “too much information” (“TMI”)—I would much prefer the whole story to the alternative.

Communication is the bedrock of our philosophy: communication between parents and children, and communication between parents and parents.

At NYC Parents In Action, it’s communication that forms our connection. Communication is the bedrock of our philosophy: communication between parents and children, and communication between parents and parents. Every year, over 250 facilitated ParentTalk meetings include parents talking and sharing information; our seminars such as the recent “Teen Brain on Drugs” communicate essential information; future events such as our “Fathers Only Discussion” and “Teen Scene” keep the conversation going; and our Newsletters provide more fodder for connection. Although NYC PIA isn’t a church or a club or a school, it is one of those organizations that make living in this enormous metropolis like living in a small town, with parents all working toward a similar goal and searching for ways to be informed, involved and connected.

Some might say I am putting my children at a disadvantage in certain ways—they don’t have access to vast areas of outdoor space and they have to learn adult lessons, such as how to market themselves at a young age—but I know my children are safe here. My skeptical pals from outside the region wouldn’t ever understand the term “safe” in the same sentence as NYC, but I know that parents here, particularly independent school parents, have my back. I know

PRESIDENT'S LETTER CONTINUED

that if my son or one of his friends veers off the path then my community will be there for me. Someone will pick up the phone, stop me on the street or send a message that we need to talk. And, I in turn, will do the same. I have seen it time and again. Talking to friends who have left our big city/small town, I am always shocked that one of the most difficult things they face is parents who are unwilling to share information, or are not ready to discuss difficult subjects. I am proud to be part of a community connected through a willingness to communicate.

I hope my son doesn't get lost on the way to the SSAT, high school or life in general. But, if he does, I am confident that the parents in the city, through their collective connections, will help me through. We are all communicators, and that makes me feel safe.

LIB GOSS

Dr. Perry Klass: Prescriptions for Practical Parenting

BY PAMELA AWAD

Perri Klass does a lot of things. She is a pediatrician, writer, wife and mother of three. She knits, cooks, and spends time as medical director of the literacy organization “Reach Out and Read.” On the last Monday of October, at NYC-PIA’s Fall Benefit lunch, she also found time to speak to 200 well-behaved grown-ups about sleep, scream time, substance abuse, the secret of life and growing up.

Presently a professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at NYU, Klass’ talk was a perfect marriage of medicine and motherhood. She discussed multi-tasking (children may sometimes be better at this—it really may be harder for those of us with “old brains”); genetics; fate; possible sources of stress, i.e., depression or sleep deprivation; and the angst of giving hypocritical advice (what I say as a doctor versus what I do as a parent).

Having a child changes you forever, and what we are doing here is helping them grow up and outgrow us.

Klass is round faced and genial with self-described shoulder length, “frizzy, leftover-hippie hair.” Her manner is warm and self-deprecating and she is reassuring in her advice. “Having a child changes you forever,” she said, “and what we are doing here is helping them grow up and outgrow us.” No matter how many children we have “we never feel like an expert,” she said, advising her audience to “acknowledge that parenthood is full of battles to lose,” and in the war for independence, remember that “as children achieve autonomy they will carry our voices in their heads, then they will leave us behind.” Bittersweet, but perhaps less so if they are self supporting.

Klass is disarming in her honesty. She asks, “As a doctor, how do you give advice in the exam room when you are struggling yourself? How does Perri handle stress in a nice sensitive, motherly way?” Perhaps by remembering that much of our behavior, as well as our children’s, is due to “choice, chance and temperament.” She advises parents to “encourage, celebrate and enjoy” their children and refrain from getting too caught up in “thou shalt not’s.” How do you help children “find what they like and love, how do you help a child find a passion?” She answered the question with a succinct, “You probably don’t.” They will find it themselves.

Back to the nitty-gritty: regarding sleep (and for some, that seemingly elusive sleep gene), sleep needs remain constant, but sleep cycles change. It is important to recognize that sleep is important to the health of children but some children really don’t need as much of it as others. As a doctor, she advises parents to “understand what you do around sleep to make it a good routine,” although as a mother, Klass admits bedtime routines were so haphazard in her house her children later marveled at the very idea of a “bedtime.”

As for multi-tasking and those old brains, we adults may “lack a certain fluency” that reduces adult productivity when multi-tasking, but there is no consensus on the effects of multi-tasking in children. Klass offers logical advice to “work in an environment conducive to your strengths” and when dealing with the question of homework, remind children that first, “the point of homework is to learn how you learn” and second, parents and children will forever disagree about how effectively homework can be completed with distractions. Klass believes children develop their own style of learning, which leads to the question

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENTING CONTINUED

of tutoring. Should a child have a tutor? “It depends on the kid,” she says, “kids shouldn’t suffer terribly to learn.”

Regarding substance abuse, genetics and the moral question of honesty, Klass weighs in with the following: experts differ on their advice about honesty when discussing their own past use of drugs and alcohol.

All agree however, that given the knowledge we now

If a teenager is self-medicating, it is usually their attempt to make something stop hurting.

have about the adolescent brain and its development, there are serious risks to experimenting with drugs and alcohol. For those of us still worried about the honesty question, Klass’ children reminded her that it was their friends that mattered most when it came to drug and alcohol use. What parents did in their remote pasts may actually matter less to children than what their peer group is doing now. And, while there is “definitely a genetic component to drug and alcohol addiction,” it is that some of us may be at greater risk or more vulnerable. If a teenager is self-medicating—and teenagers are “resourceful about self medication”—it is usually their attempt to make something stop hurting. “Ask, what is this making you feel better from?” Klass advises. And know that “many kids may need to have this discussion with someone beyond a parent.”

As for the secret of life? It’s really the secret to parenthood and it has to do with spaghetti sauce. Klass figured it out while teaching her son to cook and it goes something like this: Children grow up, but becoming a grown-up means being able to take care of yourself, being able to take care of the “basic necessities of life, like food and shelter. If you can scramble your own

eggs, sew the button that just fell off, create for yourself the kind of home in which you want to live, you’re a grown-up.” And as parents, even more than wanting our kids to turn out to be people worth knowing, we want them to turn out to be people. Start with a good recipe for spaghetti sauce and they are well on their way.

As a parent, you hope your child “will never suffer, never be hurt, never be shut out of anything. [We also] believe they will never be harsh or cruel to another child, never have sex, stupid sex, too young sex . . . never risk their lives, selves, futures, by taking some dumb chance.” But children go on a journey without us and Klass urges parents to “help them to be independent and not need you.” In fact, says Klass, we are “preparing for them to leave” us. She tells us to find our passions with our children and to keep giving advice (even if it sometimes feels like nagging), so they always carry our voices in their heads.

Then we get to take a really long vacation. ●

Perri Klass is a Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute at New York University and National Medical Director of “Reach Out and Read.” She has written extensively about medicine, children, literacy and knitting. Her non-fiction includes *Every Mother Is a Daughter: The Neverending Quest for Success, Inner Peace and a Really Clean Kitchen*, which she coauthored with her mother; her most recent books are *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor*, and *The Mercy Rule*, a novel.

Orlando Bloom on Dyslexia: The Chance to Have a Big Life

BY AIMEE GARN

As an actor, Orlando Bloom has starred in “The Lord of the Rings” and “Pirates of the Caribbean” trilogies, which include four of the past decade’s ten top-grossing movies. As an activist and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, Bloom has raised awareness for programs that provide clean water and education for needy children. Rather than focusing on acting and activism, in a conversation with Dr. Harold Koplewicz, President of the Child Mind Institute, Bloom spoke about his experience growing up with dyslexia. Bloom was the eighth honoree of the Adam Jeffrey Katz Memorial Lecture Series, a program of conversations between Dr. Koplewicz and exceptional people whose lives have been affected by dyslexia, ADHD and other learning disabilities. The event was presented on June 2, 2010 by the Child Mind Institute and co-sponsored by NYC-Parents in Action.

Bloom grew up in the cathedral city of Canterbury in Kent, home to a colorful street scene. His earliest impressions were of actors and mimes performing on the city streets. The man he believed to be his father, the South African-born Jewish novelist Harry Saul Bloom, died when Orlando was four. His mother raised him along with his older sister, and not until late adolescence did he learn that his biological father was actually his mother’s partner, Colin Stone.

Bloom’s early experience at school was “a great struggle,” and “very hard work.” He was active and athletic, but also distracted and accident-prone. He realized later that the many fractures he suffered—including those of the skull, back, leg, arm and fingers—may have been due in part to ADHD. He knew he “wasn’t stupid,” but his difficulties with reading and spelling left him angry and frustrated. At the age of seven, his mother took him to a London specialist who diagnosed his dyslexia and confirmed his high intelligence.

Bloom hid his dyslexia from his friends and worked hard to keep up academically. While at times he hated school because of the academic struggle, he was socially capable and a team sports captain. Reading, writing, spelling and math were difficult subjects, but he did well in science and the creative arts, excelling in ceramics, photography and theater. By eleven he imagined being an actor, thinking, “it would be great to be different characters throughout life.” Although he found reading aloud difficult, he discovered that being on stage helped him to focus and learn his lines thoroughly. With the encouragement of his drama teacher, he assumed the lead in many school plays.

Bloom hid his dyslexia from his friends and worked hard to keep up academically.

Bloom credits his mother for her unconditional support. She was his “cheerleader” and coach, encouraging him to memorize poetry and bible passages and to enter competitions, including the Kent Festival. She urged him to achieve and found ways to motivate him as he grew: “If you read 50 books, you’ll get a motor bike,” was one challenge. He didn’t read 50 books, but his mother’s practice of setting goals and pushing him to meet them fostered strong work habits. At 16, Bloom moved to London for his A Levels, undertaking a demanding course of study in academic art with classes in drama, photography, and sculpture. He lived with family friends, but functioned independently. “I felt the responsibility of it, and the opportunity,” he said. He joined the National Youth Theater, trained at the British American Drama Academy and later attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He signed with an agent while still in school, winning a part in “The Lord of the Rings” soon after graduating.

BLOOM ON DYSLLEXIA CONTINUED

He credits his mentors, including Johnny Depp, with helping to guide his career.

How does dyslexia affect his life today? “Time gets away from me,” he says, “I have trouble staying on track.” Bloom still finds his mind “moves too quickly” and “writing is too slow.” He employs an assistant who helps him stay organized and offers support with computer work. His strategies for success include allowing extra time for reading and learning lines, and having scripts printed on yellow or green paper for easier reading. He prefers to have his lines in advance in order to learn them thoroughly, and acknowledges the

“With dyslexia comes a very great gift, which is the way that your mind can think creatively,” Bloom says.

difficulty of absorbing rewrites. Asked what he would recommend to an eight- or nine-year-old child who has dyslexia, Bloom said: “Know that you’re part of a very special club. It’s a gift. Don’t ever let anyone tell you that you’re not good enough, or that because you struggle with dyslexia you’re not going to make it. It’s simply not true. It can be the opportunity of your life.” He urged children with the disability to “hold onto your dreams” and to “take this obstacle and make it the reason to have a big life.”

Bloom reminded parents that children struggling with dyslexia “deserve to know they are special.” His insights were keen: “The greatest gift is to give them the sense that nothing is unattainable. With dyslexia comes a very great gift, which is the way that your mind can think creatively. If kids can be given the opportunity to find that way of thinking, what works for them, then they will be very happy and successful in whatever field they choose to go into.” He encouraged parents to be patient with a child’s frustration at not being able to keep up, and suggested they give the child “opportunities to try things and find a passion.” He noted that information about dyslexia was less widely known

when he was young, and educators are now more aware of ways to support children with dyslexia, often providing them with books on tape or computers for note-taking in class. A physical outlet like sports, or a creative pursuit like art or music is also important.

What factors made Orlando Bloom’s experience with dyslexia largely positive, and a contributing factor in his extraordinary success? His early diagnosis was a great advantage. He always believed he was smart and capable despite his struggles with reading. That understanding, along with his athletic prowess and artistic accomplishments, helped preserve his self-esteem and offset the academic challenges he faced. His mother’s emphasis on setting goals and working hard helped him acquire the habit of thorough preparation and likely attracted mentors who recognized his talent early. In addition, spirituality has always been part of Bloom’s life. Although reared in the Church of England, he has embraced Buddhist philosophy and practices meditation, which he believes helps him to focus. Bloom clearly had the ambition and drive to succeed, but his attitude that dyslexia is “hard work, but in the end a real gift,” is surely a factor in his success.

The maturity and empathy Bloom displayed in discussing his dyslexia and generously sharing his insights were an inspiration for all children, with and without learning challenges: “[To deal with dyslexia] you have to have faith in yourself and believe that you can do anything. Nothing is unattainable. You have the opportunity to understand how you think and learn, and that can bring you success in life.” We wish Orlando Bloom continuing success in his career, congratulate him on his recent marriage to model Miranda Kerr and celebrate the birth of their first child. ●

Mt. Sinai Panel Seminar: Insights on ‘The Teenage Brain on Drugs’

BY SUSAN FISHER

On a beautiful November night, while other activities around NYC beckoned, a large crowd of parents streamed into the auditorium of the Nightingale-Bamford School to hear a panel of experts presenting information about “The Teenage Brain on Drugs.” Co-sponsored by NYC Parents in Action and Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health Center, four preeminent doctors participated in a panel discussion moderated by pediatrician Dr. Anne Nucci-Sack of Mt. Sinai.

Teenagers believe abusing prescription drugs is safer than abusing other types of drugs.

The opening presentation, given by child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. Tolu Olupona, included an overview of nationwide drug use among teenagers. Dr. Olupona noted that the year 2000 marked the point at which illicit drug use reached a plateau, whilst marijuana use and prescription drug abuse continues to increase annually. Interestingly, cigarette smoking in high school reached an all time low in 2009, although it is still a popular “drug”—20% of twelfth graders say they have smoked in the last month. (By comparison, 43.5% of twelfth graders have drunk alcohol in the last month and 72.3% have had alcohol at some point in high school.) Over 36% of all Americans report having tried cocaine at least once. But use is declining, which is important to note, since cocaine is the drug most highly correlated with drug use in adult life.

Of the significant insights Dr. Olupona offered, the most notable was that teenagers believe abusing prescription drugs is safer than abusing other types of drugs. The vast majority gets prescription drugs from their parents’ medicine cabinets, buys medications from other children, and even steals prescription pads

from a doctor’s desktop. Less than 5% buy pills from a “dealer,” or, in other words, a complete stranger.

The second presenter was Dr. Harris Stratyner, the Regional VP Clinical Services, Caron NY and a clinician at the Caron Treatment Center, who discussed “Treatment Types and Approaches.” He offered a quick primer on parenting the adolescent, with the following highlights:

- “Engage your child in discussion.”
- “Set expectations.”
- “Find out: Where are you going? What time will you be home? Who will be there? What is the phone number?”
- “You are not your child’s buddy. Kids want boundaries.”
- “Kids respond well to having responsibilities even if they make a fuss.”
- “Use facts, not scare tactics.”
- “It is important to have meals together because it presents an opportunity for talking.”

Dr. Stratyner’s young patients are already addicts by the time he meets them. When treating these children, he espouses the Transtheoretical Model of Change, comprising six stages that describe an individual’s readiness to adopt healthier behavior. He warns parents

This Mount Sinai Seminar took place on Wednesday, November 10, 2010. It was co-sponsored by NYC Parents in Action and Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health Center.

Panelists included Dr. Tolu Olupona, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Mt. Sinai; Dr. Yasmin Hurd, Professor of Psychiatry, Pharmacology and Neuroscience, Mt. Sinai; Dr. Harris Stratyner, Clinical Director, Caron Treatment Center, NY Region; Dr. Paul Hokemeyer, Family and Addiction Therapist, Caron Center.

It was moderated by Dr. Anne T. Nucci-Sack, Pediatrician, Chief Medical Officer and Medical Director of the Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health Center.

TEENAGE BRAIN ON DRUGS CONTINUED

that at stage two many teens do serious damage and some even die, in part because teenagers do not have the same sense of time or urgency as adults. Detailed descriptions of the six stages are:

Stage 1: Precontemplation — “people are not intending to take action in the foreseeable future, usually measured as the next 6 months”;

Stage 2: Contemplation — “people are intending to change in the next 6 months”;

Stage 3: Preparation — “people are intending to take action in the immediate future, usually measured as the next month”;

Stage 4: Action — “people have made specific overt modifications in their life styles within the past 6 months”;

Stage 5: Maintenance — “people are working to prevent relapse,” a stage which is estimated to last “from 6 months to about 5 years”;

Stage 6: Termination — “individuals have zero temptation and 100% self-efficacy... they are sure they will not return to their old unhealthy habit as a way of coping.”

Dr. Yasmin Hurd, Professor of Psychiatry, Pharmacology and Neuroscience at Mt. Sinai, gave a presentation about “Drug Effects on the Developing Brain.” The results, using data obtained from children exposed to marijuana while in utero, indicate different brain development from those children who were not exposed to marijuana while in utero. Specifically, the brains in those exposed to marijuana show impaired ability to stop addictive behavior. This differs from previously held theories that addicts seek pleasurable “rewards” from their addictions, that is, the increased dopamine and endorphins act as “the natural heroin.” From her own data and other research in the field, Dr. Hurd concludes that some addictive behavior is genetically mapped.

The last presenter of the evening, Dr. Hokemeyer, Ph.D., J.D., also a clinician at Caron Treatment

Center, talked about “Predictors and Prevention, How to Prevent Substance Abuse Becoming Addiction.” His often-repeated message to the audience was, “Above all, your children are watching and reacting to you.” Hence, abuse and family conflict lead to a higher percentage of teenage addicts, and similarly, what parents do rather than what parents say, holds the greater influence. For example, parents who have cocktails at the end of a stressful day can send the message that alcohol is a form of stress management.

From her own data and other research in the field, Dr. Hurd concludes that some addictive behavior is genetically mapped.

Reiterating the parenting advice, “Know your child’s friends,” Dr. Hokemeyer explained that adolescents’ identities are formed largely by external influences, including peers, TV shows and popular culture in general. He advises parents to:

- Find opportunities to discuss what your children are absorbing; explore what they think without passing harsh judgment. For example, ask, “Who is your favorite music group and what do you like about them?”
- Talk about the phenomenon of teenagers identifying and/or glamorizing unhealthy celebrities.
- Respect what children say.
- Set boundaries, but explain your reasons for them. Do not say, “Because I said so.”
- Try to understand their world, not vice versa.
- Remember that drugs in the 70s were much weaker than the drugs available today.

In keeping with his message, “Your children are watching you more than they are listening to you,” Dr. Hokemeyer reminded the audience that if a parent has a problem with addiction, it is yet again a role-modeling opportunity to demonstrate how one seeks proper help for a problem.

TEENAGE BRAIN ON DRUGS CONTINUED

The panel wrapped up the evening with a lively Q&A session during which, across the board, the doctors agreed unanimously on various issues:

- In adolescence, zero tolerance is more effective than teaching a child to “drink responsibly.” It is a myth that European children, having had wine at family meals from an early age, have a lower incidence of alcoholism than Americans.
- Never allow your children to use drugs with you, or in front of you.
- There are some genetic components to addictions.
- It is a good idea to practice with your child strategies for handling alcohol/drug situations.
- The longer one can delay experimentation, the better the chance of avoiding addiction. ●

NYC-Parents in Action, Inc. invites speakers to present their opinions and expertise on specific topics. Their opinions and comments are not necessarily those of NYC-PIA.

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<<http://www.parentsinaction.org>>
- WEB SITE CHAIR:** Karen Bigman

Our Web site is a great source of information about our programs, upcoming events and other parenting resources.

Train to Be a Discussion Group Facilitator

Are you looking to give back the support and shared experience other parents have given you during the child-rearing years? If you are, here's a way:

VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

NYC-Parents in Action provides facilitated discussion groups free of charge to member schools. To serve an increasing number of requests for discussion groups, we need to train parent volunteers from as many schools as possible. We are looking for parents who are articulate, comfortable speaking in groups, and have an interest in parenting issues. Our goal is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and concerns among parents and to create a comfortable communications network that will be in place through lower, middle and upper school. Facilitators receive professional training, and become an integral and valued part of the NYC-PIA community. If you would like more information about becoming a discussion group facilitator or about our upcoming training, please call NYC-PIA at 212-426-0240 or e-mail facilitation@parentsinaction.org.

Facilitation Group Coordinator: Josseline Charas