

# Guidance Gazette

November 2016



Torrington High  
School  
Counseling  
Department

Special points  
of interest:

- Alcohol & Drug use among teens
- Academic Success Skills
- Scholarship resource info
- Reality Check
- Creating a PowerSchool Account
- Attendance

## The Rates of Drug and Alcohol Use Among Teens is DECREASING...

### Does This Mean Parents Can Relax ?

By Christine Abbott, School Counselor

In 2016 the Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey conducted amongst American 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders revealed a decreasing trend in the use of alcohol, cigarettes and illicit drugs with the exception of marijuana. Perhaps marijuana's steady rate of use can be attributed to the fact that students' perception of it as a harmful drug has decreased as well. In 2015, 21.3 percent of high school seniors used marijuana within the previous month. Six percent reported daily use of marijuana.

([www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)). Although these facts may seem encouraging to some, if applied to our school it would suggest that approximately 191 students have used marijuana in the last 30 days and 54 of those students are smoking marijuana every day. As counselors we frequently work with students whose lives have been negatively impacted since they began smoking marijuana. It's been my experience that students who are severely lacking in motivation and having difficulty with attendance are frequently (but not always) also engaging in significant marijuana use. For this reason, I sought to understand the perception of others and this is what I found:

- ◇ "I think it's increasing and people don't take it seriously." (Counselor)
- ◇ "Marijuana is a huge problem." (Female Student, 11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- ◇ "Kids are using pot to self-medicate." (Social Worker)
- ◇ "Because it's being legalized, people think there's nothing wrong with it... definitely increasing." (Parent)
- ◇ "It's definitely increasing." (Female Students, 11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- ◇ "Everybody smokes pot." (Male students, 12<sup>th</sup> grade)
- ◇ "It seems like parents know and don't do anything about it." (Counselor)
- ◇ "Many students are using marijuana to cope." (Teacher)
- ◇ "Alcohol is not a big issue. Marijuana is." (Female Student, 11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- ◇ "Students can get addicted and it can lead to other drugs." (Female student, 11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- ◇ "The biggest concern is driving impaired. It's done purposely and it's called a 'blunt ride.' But kids don't care." (Female Student, 11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- ◇ "I think kids are experimenting younger and younger." (Male student, 12<sup>th</sup> grade)
- ◇ "As more and more people use and long-term studies develop, we will better understand the negative consequences of marijuana use." (Parent)
- ◇ "It leads people to act stupid, make bad decisions and get taken advantage of." (11<sup>th</sup> grade student)

- ◇ “I feel like things have quieted down this year compared to last year but my daughter who is a high school student at a nearby high school has said that if they drug tested kids, the entire sports program would be shut down.” (Teacher)
- ◇ “The smell of marijuana is so recognizable but students don’t realize we can smell it on them when they walk by us....No matter how much Axe they spray or mints they suck on.” (Counselor)
- ◇ There’s definitely a population of kids who are experimenting with much more....MOLLY’s, Xanax, Cocaine, Acid, and more.” (Female Student, 11<sup>th</sup> grade)

These perceptions suggest that there is still reason to be concerned about marijuana use amongst high school students. There are kids affected by use but frequently the parents are not aware or have no idea what they can do. Please read below for some of the traps parents fall into which can prevent them from recognizing if a problem exists:

**Not following your heart.** You know your child best and if you are concerned you should push to learn more. Are you comfortable with their friends? How are they spending their money? Are they suddenly obsessed with having Visine, hand sanitizer, mints/gum, and perfumes or sprays with them at all times? Are they just going for quick drives but avoid you upon return? If so, please investigate. Parents are sometimes worried that they will come across as crazy, overbearing and at fault. There are many conscientious parents whose nice kids never get into trouble and so they convince themselves that it is not a problem and it will all work out. Don’t fall into that trap!

**Subscribing to the mantra that marijuana is not a big deal.** Everyone around you will tell you it’s harmless, and legal, and everybody does it. As a matter of fact you can’t even get your kid intensive help for marijuana addiction unless you pay yourself. Most insurance carriers will not cover the costs of anything more and if they do, the most will be outpatient clinics (where I might add your child is mixed in with more serious addicts using heroin and cocaine that can “teach” them a thing or two right after group therapy). As a counselor I have seen some adolescents who smoke occasionally and experience few if any adverse effects on their social, emotional, academic and familial well-being. However, MORE and MORE often I am seeing patterns that are concerning. There are many adolescents who are smoking way too frequently and their motivation and attitudes toward life tank. This is partially because the marijuana of today is much more potent than the marijuana of 20 years ago and it can make depression and anxiety worse in the long run.

**The idea that marijuana is not a gateway drug.** So many people are adamant that marijuana is not a gateway drug and although I do not have the expertise to weigh in on this I will say this: First, if your child is self-medicating with marijuana it can be a gateway drug because they cannot escape from their problems and can move to something stronger when they realize that. Secondly, the crowd your child is exposed to while smoking and buying marijuana can easily encourage experimentation. Finally, it is RARE that any child who has moved on to heavier drugs has started with anything besides marijuana.

**Rationalizing that smoking alone is different than drinking alcohol alone.** Try to understand what is propelling your child towards smoking alone even if he/she tells you that they also smoke with their friends. This can signal that your teen is using marijuana to cope, to reduce stress, and or avoid their reality which is indicative of self-medication patterns that can grow into a need for “heavier” coping mechanisms.

**Not admitting that broken boundaries are suggestive of a bigger problem than you might realize.** I truly believe that if your child is smoking in the home, that he/she is either crying out for help or letting you know that his/her need to smoke marijuana is pretty significant since they are willing to risk being caught at home. They will tell you otherwise but crossing a boundary that they normally would not cross warrants some investigation. In addition I do know of parents whose children have stolen money from them to buy marijuana. That is a huge breach of trust and if your child is breaking these boundaries, seek help!

**Believing them when they say everyone is doing it at age 13 or 14 or.....** The truth is there are many teenagers who are smoking and pretty regularly but not everyone is doing it. And besides even if

everyone is doing it, this does not validate his/her decision to do it as well. In addition, age is a huge factor. The earlier an adolescent begins experimenting the more at risk they are for developing an addiction later.

**Hoping your child is not high as often as you think he/she is.** Smoking daily and/or before school is frequently a sign of dependence. However, parents fall into the trap of trusting that their child is not high as often as they suspect. The truth is teens know it stays in the system for 30 days and that if you drug test them, they can tell you it was from 2-3 weeks ago.

**Downplaying the role of genetics.** There is a genetic component to addiction. As much as you want to think that your kids couldn't possibly end up like "Auntie Suzie's" kids because she is a raging alcoholic and you are not, please do not fall into that trap. Although I believe good parenting can play a role in supporting our kids, ultimately I believe parents should RUN...not walk...to seek help if genetics are involved and the child is seeking solace from any substance (except for chocolate...that's allowed).

**Thinking that good parenting, sports, strong academic grades, etc... are enough to keep a child from falling into the world of substance abuse and addiction.** Since addiction can be traced to an intermingling of multiple variables (genetics, environment, coping skills or lack thereof, social and emotional trauma, etc.) it doesn't make sense to assume that any child is safe from this epidemic. It is not always enough.

**Assuming that ADD and other mental health issues aren't relevant since they are "newer" disorders and over-exaggerated.** Don't fall into this trap of thinking these issues are not important. Please do the research to better understand how kids who have depression, social anxiety, ADD, ODD, etc...are at greater risk for substance use and abuse. In my opinion it is not a coincidence that the peak of this heroin epidemic in our society is meeting head-on with the prevalence of mental health disorders among children. Clearly more needs to be done and I'm a huge fan of early intervention.

So what can you do and where can you get help if you suspect your teen is having issues with marijuana or other drug use? First, please admit that you are worried rather than avoid the situation and rationalize your concerns away. Secondly, make a decision to seek help with trained professionals who can better assess the situation. Please know that we run a group with McCall Center for Behavioral Health here at the High School. The McCall group is focused on education, prevention and recovery if needed. The groups here are divided into 2 segments with ten sessions each and occur during THS. Please contact your child's school counselor if you want your son or daughter to enroll. Finally, please contact your child's school counselor or social worker to discuss what other options may be available. Every situation is different and warrants a level-headed approach to deciding which community resources will be in the student's best interest.

Naviance is here!

Students - Please use your activation code to create your account on our Family Connection page! Use the link below to access the website. Explore Careers, Colleges, Scholarships, Test Prep!

<https://connection.naviance.com/family-connection/auth/login/?hsid=torringtonhs>

## Academic Success: Five skills for academic success!

By Elena Sileo, School Counselor

Learn how to build these skills and stay on track all year long: organization, time management, prioritization, concentration and motivation — in order to achieve academic success!



- 1. Organization:** Whether it's keeping track of research materials or remembering to pack a lunch, children need to be organized in order to succeed in school. For many students, academic challenges are related more to a lack of organization than to a lack of their intellectual ability.
- 2. Time Management:** For some students, learning to schedule enough time to complete assignments may be difficult. Even when students have a week to do a project, some students won't start until the night before the project is due. Learning to organize time into chunks takes practice and experience.
- 3. Prioritization:** Sometimes children fall behind in school and fail to hand in assignments because they simply don't know where to begin. Prioritizing tasks is a skill your child will need throughout life, so it's never too soon to get started by helping them!
- 4. Concentration:** Whether your child is practicing vocabulary words or studying for a trigonometry test, it's important that he/she works on school-work in an area with limited distractions. Turn off that TV, phone, and computer!
- 5. Motivation:** Most students say that they want to do well in school, yet many still fail to complete the level of work that is necessary to succeed academically. The reason is often motivation. Tapping into your child's interests is a great way to get him prepared to do well in school.

**PARENT TIP:**  
**Congratulate your  
child, encourage  
them, and  
celebrate all their  
successes.**



## School Counseling Office Important Information



Fall is a great time to start looking for scholarships for college and post secondary education. Check Naviance and the webpage (<http://www.torrington.org/page.cfm?p=283>) for helpful links and scholarship opportunities as they become available. As these resources are updated on a frequent basis throughout the calendar year, check them once a week to stay informed of your scholarship opportunities!



The only person who is guaranteed not to get a scholarship is the one who doesn't apply.

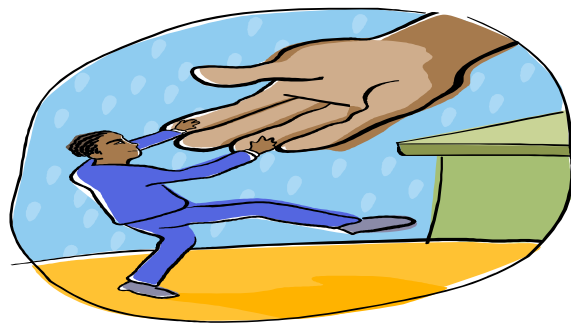
By Kathy Boutin,  
School Counseling  
Department Secretary

### To contact a school employee:

By Email: use staff's first initial then last name@torrington.org, such as [esileo@torrington.org](mailto:esileo@torrington.org)

By phone: 860-489-2291 and listen for instructions

All teachers email addresses and phone extensions can be found : <http://www.torrington.org/page.cfm?p=683>



## Creating a Student PowerSchool Account

1. Go to a desktop computer to CREATE your student account
2. Use your own **memorable** username and password
3. Remember them because THS can't recover those for you
4. In your newly created account, enter the one-time "web id" and password provided to pull your PowerSchool data into your account
5. Download the PowerSchool app, BKRP is THS's school code, and log in using your own username and password
6. Check your grades daily
7. Got a Zero? Turn it in or follow up with teacher.

# Playing College Sports – Make the First Move!

By Barbara Beebe, School Counselor

Torrington High School can boast some amazing student-athletes who have gone on to play their sport at some pretty impressive colleges. Just this past week two of our student-athletes signed their National Letter of Intent to attend and play at Division I universities. Though playing at the collegiate level is not for everyone, there are many students who simply do not consider continuing their sport in college because they do not know how to go about it. You may be thinking, “I’m not being recruited, so I guess I won’t play in college.” That is not true! If you love your sport and are a committed athlete, there is most likely a college program for you. And SURPRISE! It is usually the student-athlete who makes the first move in contacting college coaches. Here is how you can go about taking that first step.

**STEP 1:** Talk to your high school coach to get an understanding of which college athletic division where you have the greatest chance of making the team. Most colleges are divided into three divisions - Division I, Division II, and Division III. Coaches in all divisions are looking for the right student athletes for their teams. Your high school coach will give you an honest opinion of your future in a college level athletic program. Then, do some research – find several colleges that have your major and other needs - then research their athletic programs. Narrow down your college list to between 5 and 7 colleges.

**STEP 2:** Send an email to the head and assistant coaches for the sport that you would like to play at the colleges on your list. Introduce yourself with a brief summary about your work ethic and your athletic achievements (team records, individual stats, league awards, etc.). Individualize the letter for each coach/school. You are marketing yourself – so portray yourself in the best possible light with good grammar and respectful language. Let them know what you like about their program and the college, congratulate them on a winning season, or ask them questions about their team. Show that you are interested in their program and want to be a part of it.

**STEP 3:** Along with your introductory email, attach a game schedule for your upcoming season. Coaches will most likely want to see you play in person, and attaching your game schedule makes it easier for them to find games that are close by and also shows them that you are eager to have them watch you play.

**STEP 4:** When you visit college campuses, make an appointment to meet with the college coach. Bring an updated schedule, current season statistics, press clippings, or a highlight video. You can create a video on your own or find a service that will develop a video for you.

**STEP 5:** Keep the coaches updated throughout your season. Email and update or press clippings a few times throughout your season. Though coaches are limited in the number of calls/emails that they can send to you (depending on your grade, etc.) there is no limit as to how often YOU can contact the coach.

Contacting and marketing yourself to college coaches can greatly enhance your chances of playing your sport in college if that is something that you are interested in taking on. For students with the work ethic and love for their sport, it can be a fantastic experience that you may have otherwise not have realized! So go ahead and make the first move!



# Reality Check!

By Jess Odum, School Counselor



More students say they are going to college; however, fewer students have grades and classes that are on target for college admission. Be realistic about whether you meet admission requirements. High School Grades in the 70's are passing, and will get you credits to graduate high school. The same goes for the minimum graduation requirements.

If you are applying to a 4 year college, including a Connecticut State School (Central, Eastern, Western, Southern), you will need to take additional classes to meet admission standards. Add a 4th year of Math, a 4th year of lab science, and 3 years of a foreign language to your transcript to meet those standards.

The College Board uses the SAT to determine college readiness. College Board Educational Manager, Alan Bernstein, says, "We use the College Readiness Benchmark of 1050 on the SAT as an aggregate number or "benchmark" worth striving towards. It equates to a 65% chance of getting a B- (2.67 GPA) after freshmen year in college. Not getting 1050 doesn't mean the kids will bomb out, but it is a starting point for goal setting school-wide. "

Speaking of readiness, will having a C average at THS be enough to provide you with the college skills you need to be successful? Minimum effort on your part means you are not building the appropriate intellectual muscles needed to be successful at the college level. Connecticut State schools will measure your knowledge base to determine whether you are ready. How do they do that?

If attending a Connecticut State School (those mentioned above as well as any community college) , students need to take a placement exam to determine class level placement. That exam, the Accuplacer, determines whether students will be taking college level (credit bearing) courses or remedial (no credits earned) courses upon entry. Both cost the same amount of money, so if you are paying, wouldn't you rather be earning that credit?

The bottom line is that taking enough to "get you by" will not be enough to get you through.



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## Guidance Gazette

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