

**“What’s the Harm?” Panel Discussion on Teen Substance Use and Abuse
1/31/17**

Bainbridge High School Commons

Notes from the Evening

Panel:

- **Kevin Haggerty**, MSW, PhD, Prevention Expert, UW School of Social Work
- **Matthew Hamner**, Chief of the Bainbridge Island Police Department
- **Jillian Worth**, Family Physician at Virginia Mason Medical Center
- **Nicole Hayford**, Sexual Assault Coordinator, Naval Base Kitsap and Intern Therapist, Bainbridge Youth Services

Dr. Haggerty, MSW, Ph.D., is a faculty member at the Social Development Research Group, University of Washington, School of Social Work. He has specialized in the development and implementation of prevention programs at the community, school and family levels. Since 1993 he has been the Project Director for the Raising Healthy Children study, a school based approach to social development. He is an early implementer and trainer of the Guiding Good Choices parenting program. He is Principal Investigator of the NIDA funded Family Connections study, testing the Parents Who Care program, and the Focus on Families study. He is an investigator of the Community Youth Development Study, testing the effectiveness of Communities that Care. Mr. Haggerty is an international trainer and speaker in the areas of substance abuse and delinquency prevention and has written extensively in the field.

Introductions

Susie Burdick, President of Rotary Club and Executive Director of KidiMu welcomed everyone.

School Superintendent Peter Bang-Knudsen opened the evening by reviewing the “Listening Tour” he offered our community last Fall, where he met with around 500 people. Dr. Bang-Knudsen shared that the prevalent concern he heard from members of our community was concern over the health and well-being of our kids. Two main aspects of this concern that he heard are:

1) Our youth live in what feels like a “pressure cooker” environment where high achievement is expected.

2) The choices that teens are making around drugs and alcohol.

Dr. Bang-Knudsen expressed that tonight is a first step in responding to these concerns and that the goals of the evening are to:

- 1) Learn more about teen substance use
- 2) Get tips for what we can do as parents
- 3) Learn from role play demonstrations

Panel Discussion

Dr. Haggerty

Dr. Haggerty spoke of marijuana use among teens, noting that 12-17 year olds who use marijuana weekly have double the risk of developing a depression, are 3 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts and have an increased risk of developing schizophrenia in later years

Teens have a high risk of addiction. The most commonly used drug is alcohol. There is a higher rate of alcohol use in affluent communities. The younger kids are when they begin using, the more likely they are to become addicted. 45% of 14 year olds who use substances become addicted. Dr. Haggerty stressed the importance of delaying the age of initiation of trying drugs and alcohol. (See Dr. Haggerty's slides for more details)

Dr. Haggerty addressed the myth that alcohol use in Europe is less because youth are "taught how to drink" at a younger age. He asserted that there a lot more heavy drinkers in Europe. He said that if you teach young people to drink in moderation, they actually just learn to drink, period, and are more likely to become heavy drinkers.

On a positive note, Dr. Haggerty pointed out that on Bainbridge Island, 83% of 10 grade youth report no cigarette use ever, 57% report no alcohol use ever, and 56% report no marijuana use ever. (See slide deck)

On the subject of teens having suicidal thoughts, Dr. Haggerty says that 13% of 8th-10th graders report suicidal thoughts and 15% of 12th graders report suicidal thoughts. (See slide deck)

Bainbridge Police Chief Matthew Hamner

The substances that youth on Bainbridge Island use the most are alcohol and marijuana. In 2016, the “hot spots” that came to the attention of the police involved 23 incidents of groups of teens engaged in parties where substances were being used. 3 of these were in a park and 20 were house parties with no adult supervision. The parties where the police intervened included as many as 30-50 kids who had been drinking lots of alcohol and there were kids who had passed out.

Chief Hamner spoke of how THC levels are now 8-10 times higher in marijuana than they were 30 years ago.

Chief Hamner recently attended an Opioid Summit where drugs like Percocet, Valium and Oxycontin were discussed. These drugs are highly addictive. A big concern is that kids are mixing these dangerous drugs with alcohol.

Legal ramifications -while it is legal for kids to drink in their own homes, if other underage youth drink in your home, it is considered “contributing to the delinquency of a minor” and you can be charged with a misdemeanor.

There are 2-3 police on duty at any time for an island of 24,000. When officers are called to a home where kids are drinking and taking drugs, what the officers first concern is for the safety of all involved. They prefer to have the kids call their parents to come and get them and aren’t out to “get” kids. The Bainbridge Police do not typically make arrests. They may issue a citation for a “minor in possession of alcohol.” Chief Hamner says that, “What we want to do is change behavior”. That is the main focus for BI Police- to keep teens safe and promote healthy choices.

Dr. Jillian Worth

Dr. Worth introduced us to the teen brain. She said, “Teen brains are a work in process. They begin pruning and sprouting neurons right about the time teens begin using substances”. Dr. Worth shared that teen brains are vulnerable, that they develop from back to front, so the prefrontal cortex develops last. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for many things, including decision making. But for the teen brain, “The referee is not on the field.” Then when hormones are added, you will see risky behaviors among boys in particular. Girls experiencing an estrogen bath want to be with their friends.

There is a dopamine reward system in the teen brain. Dopamine that is released from drugs and alcohol translate to higher highs and lower lows than would happen with an adult because the teen brain is not fully formed. The result is that teen brains are more prone to addiction. Kids who use drugs and alcohol at a young age can’t enjoy regular life as much because the bar has been set too high. Normal life

seems rather dull.

Prescription drug abuse is on an enormous uptick. Washington state has the 10th highest prescription drug abuse rate in the country, with Xanax being the drug used the most. At Well Child visits, youth are asked to fill out a check list regarding prescription drug use. Even kids from healthy, balanced families state that they use Xanax for anxiety and 1/3 of youth say they self harm.

Dr. Worth reviewed a study done in Iceland, which had some of the highest rates of substance use in Europe in the 80's and 90's. Now, after developing free after-school programs for kids and encouraging parent education and involvement, they have some of the lowest substance use rates in Europe.

Nicole Hayford

Ms. Hayford responded to questions commonly asked by parents at Bainbridge Youth Services:

Q: How do I know my kids are using alcohol to cope?

A: You don't. Ask them! Go to a place that is safe for them. Ask if you can talk now or ask when you can talk. When they talk about "friends", they are testing you. They want to figure out if are you a safe person to talk to.

Q: Is there a connection between substance use and sexual assault?

A: Kids drug themselves. They drink a huge amount of alcohol in a short amount of time. There is a culture of grooming in our community, both males and females are grooming kids at parties. They will make "Jungle Juice" which is Ever-clear and some kind of juice. Kids are passing out and their friends are not taking care of them. Groomers take advantage of this situation.

Q: Should I talk to my kids even if they don't use drugs and alcohol?

A: Yes! Assume that drugs and alcohol will be in their lives. Talk to them early. Kids need to know you are there and are honest. Empower them to be good friends, to step in and stand up for a friend who can't empower themselves.

Questions from the audience:

Q: What is the Good Samaritan Law?

A: Chief Hamner: This "law" is for youth, to help them feel confident they can

call for help and not get in trouble. The Good Samaritan Law means that if you call the police in order to help someone, you are immune from getting in trouble.

Q: Regarding marijuana being 10 times stronger than it used to be, is this legal or illegal stuff? How easy is it to get in on here on the island?

A: Chief Hamner: Yes, it is very easy to get marijuana here. Regarding THC levels, I am not sure if they're legal and I'm not sure if the (local marijuana shop) sells that. Most marijuana has 8-15% THC levels, some much higher, compared to 2-3% 30 years ago.

Q: What is a "gateway drug"?

A: Dr. Worth: A gateway drug is one that can lead to harder drug. If a person starts using Xanax, when they run out of their prescription and can't get it anymore, they may move on to other street drugs that can be found, like heroine. Any drug can be a gateway drug.

Q: Where can you take your prescription drugs to be turned in?

A: Chief Hamner: Poulsbo City Hall. By the end of 2017, a bill is being considered to make pharmaceutical companies have a take back location in every community. (See Resource list for other locations)

Q: The [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#) study says that there is a correlation between childhood trauma and and substance abuse and that those kids start using earlier. Dr. Haggerty, can you speak to that?

A: Dr. Haggerty: Yes, this is true. What we need to be asking now is how do we prevent ACES to begin with?

Q: Ten teen women from BHS have reported being sexually assaulted and said they didn't get help from the professionals here.

A: Sarah Frost, the Student Assistant Professional at BHS and Eagle Harbor High: There has been a supportive response to these teens and several of them have begun a support group called "Students Against Sexual Assault".

Ms. Frost continued: The most common ACE involves substance and alcohol use by parents. I ask teens: "Are you worried about your parents' drug and alcohol use?" I hear our kids are worried about our substance use as parents.

A: Chief Hamner: I want people to feel safe to come to our office. If someone has been sexually assaulted we will respond to them with 'no shame, no guilt, no fault'. We will follow through and investigate and present the evidence to the

prosecutor. We don't press charges but turn it over to the prosecuting attorney's office.

A suggestion from the audience: We need a Community Center for Teens.

Tips/Take-aways for Parents: What can a parent do to support their child?

Dr. Haggerty:

What can parents do? Kids need freedom and independence. Help them become meaningfully involved in something they like to do. This allows them to bond to these institutions and to the people in them. This will lead to opportunities, skills and recognition.

Know the law, teach and coach skills, reinforce guidelines, monitor where your child is going and who they are going with, provide both positive and negative consequences for their actions.

When talking to your kids : Listen and watch for overloading. Avoid comments that minimize their problems. Offer reassurance and help to support them. Model effective coping skills (think about how and when **you** drink!). Teach specific skills to help kids learn how to deal with stress. Offer guidelines. Don't be their friend. Monitor what they are doing. When thinking of consequences, think of all things that start with the letter "C": Consequences= cars, cell phones, cash/credit, chores, clothes, curfew, computers. Show kids what's been done wrong- give them ownership, give them options to solve problems and leave their dignity intact.

Common mistakes parents make: We talk too much. We need to listen more. We fail to grow our children. We attend to the negative. We tell our kids what not to do but forget to tell them what **to** do. Remember the 5:1 ratio: 5 positive reflections to 1 negative. We forget to have fun with our kids.

Chief Hamner:

Remember the Good Samaritan Law. Get rid of old prescription drugs. Take them to Poulsbo City Hall. Lock up your alcohol. If we call you, pick up your child. Please help us. Don't threaten to sue us or say your child didn't do anything. Please help us help your child learn to make better choices.

Ms. Hayford:

Showed us the [Cup of Tea Video](#), the clean version. She shows this video to all of her middle and high school students. It teaches what sexual consent is in a nonsexual context.

Consent isn't just about having others touch your body. Help your child become an expert in having their voice heard.

Talk to your boys- this is not just an issue for girls.

Dr. Worth:

Lock your medications up. Return them safely (when you no longer need them). Talk to your kids openly to help them feel normal by sharing your own experiences and your family history around drugs and alcohol. The most valuable asset you have is your relationship with your kids.

Question and Answers

Q: Tip from a parent in the audience: I give my phone number to my child's friends and tell them to call me if they need help. Then I wonder if I should call their parents?

Suggestion: Assess the risk- if it's high risk then you have to do the right thing. If possible, Ask **the teens themselves** to tell their parent.

Have a contract between you and your teen: no questions for 24 hours after a call to be picked up. Allow time for emotions to cool.

Q: Regarding drugs for sale at BHS. How is that being policed?

A: BHS Principal Duane Fish: if you know things are going on, have them tell someone they trust.

A: EHHS Principal David Shockley: we will work with counselors and Student Assistance Professionals, police, parents. We want kids to be happy, healthy and whole. Student safety is our priority.

Role Plays

Closing Remarks

Dr. Bang-Knudsen: Think this: “I can make a difference”. Your homework: go have a conversation with a kid. Apply these ideas.

Bainbridge Island Mayor Val Tollefsen: Our kids need to learn these lessons: The importance of communication with other kids, teachers and groups in our community. The importance of trust and the ability of kids to learn lessons and make good decisions.