

Summary of Presentation by Linda Kraft  
**Issues of Teenaged Drinking & Drug Use**  
March 6, 2007  
By Janet Maurer, Ph.D.

Despite the bone chilling weather outside, Linda Kraft managed to heat up the room as she discussed current trends in teen drug and alcohol use and the legal implications for parents. She began by stressing that this is a value laden and emotionally charged hot topic. While the legal issues involved with underage drinking are clear cut, parameters for parental responses are fuzzy; it is up to parents to ferret this out for themselves. Parents must draw their own conclusions and decide what is right for their own children within the context of the law and individual family value systems.

Ms. Kraft first addressed the question that many parents wonder about: what is your legal liability when you serve alcoholic beverages to guests in your home? This refers to the “*social host*” law. In essence, if you serve alcohol to an adult in your home, you are NOT legally liable if the adult becomes intoxicated or gets in a subsequent auto accident. **If you serve alcohol to a minor (under the age of 21), however, you ARE criminally liable.** More specifically, if you buy or serve alcohol to a minor or *know that there is alcohol in the home*, you are liable, even if the child is not visibly ‘drunk.’ If underage drinking occurs in your home and you have no knowledge of the activity (i.e. you are not home), you might not be held liable. Proving knowledge or lack of knowledge, however, is a gray area.

#### Recommended Web Sites

[Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America](#)

[Alcohol and Drug Use in Cars](#)  
(nat'l survey)

[Don't Serve Teens](#) (FTC)

[Prosecuting Parents for Underage Drinking](#)

If there was one take home message from this presentation it was that parent-child communication is the best defense against high risk behavior in teens. We know that as teens tackle the developmental task of separation from parents they often pull away from parents and become less communicative. It may become increasingly more difficult to really know what your teen is thinking, feeling, and doing. It is vital, therefore, to develop and maintain an open system of communication between parent and child as early as possible. Make sure to ask your child questions, but, more importantly, make sure to listen. There should be no taboo topics. Take advantage of teachable moments. Also, you might find it helpful to discuss sensitive issues indirectly; for example, ask your child how kids in general might handle certain situations. Research tells us that even though teens may seem not to hear us, they are not necessarily rejecting our values. Teens actually report that parents’ teachings and values have a significant influence over their beliefs.

Remember that most teens are ‘good kids’. These good kids also experience stress at times and may make some errors in judgment and take unnecessary risks. Sometimes it is the inability to manage difficult or uncomfortable feelings that leads teens to substance use. They may use mood altering substances because they haven’t yet learned adaptive strategies for tolerating discomfort. Ms. Kraft called this phenomenon “anaesthetizing the pimple.” Some teens use drugs and/or alcohol because it helps them feel socially comfortable (although they may not have conscious awareness of this connection). Some teens use substances because they are interested in trying something new or are responding to media influence. In effect, some teens use for the same reasons that some adults used when they were young or continue to use now. Helping teens learn healthy and adaptive coping strategies is clearly a

critical parenting task.

Adults also need to educate themselves about gateway drugs (alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and inhalants) and the relationship between these substances and addiction. We have known for a while that smoking tobacco is more than just a bad habit, but it has become increasingly clear that some smokers may be self medicating for depression, anxiety, and attention difficulties. Gateway drugs are clearly not innocuous. Pay attention to the mixed messages we send to children about these substances. For example, the scented markers we buy for our children really teach them to 'huff.' And while we think a Philly blunt is just a cigar, teens know about cutting out the tobacco and filling the blunt with marijuana and smoking it 'just like Dad.' Also remember that some substances are dangerous even if they are legal. A prime example of this is cough medicine that some teens falsely believe is safe even when ingested in huge quantities ("robotripping").

A visit from Linda Kraft is never complete without her display of 'toys.' She brought examples of objects that many adults would never suspect were drug paraphernalia: empty soda cans and juice boxes turned into pipes, Reddi-whip containers used for huffing, tampons soaked with alcohol for bingeing. The message here is that teens have been known to be very creative and resourceful in the quest for excitement, novelty, escape, self medication, and risk taking. Remember to keep your eyes open, talk with your children, ask questions, and make your views about substance use known. Parenting is a difficult job, especially when it comes to high risk behavior, so it might be helpful to find a support network of parents who share your views about teen risks and parental limits. Communication—parent-to-parent and parent-to-child—is the best tool we have. It really does take a village to raise a child.

Note: if you would like copies of Ms. Kraft's handouts, please stop by the Upper School counseling office in room 7.

Linda Kraft's talk was co-sponsored by GAPN and the GA Counseling Department