

What Does Back To School Really Mean to Me?

Entering junior high / high school and college can be a very difficult time of life. Just as one is starting to feel independent, the influence of people their age is especially powerful and can influence the way they feel, act, dress and behave. It is simply a risky time for adolescents and young adults.

For some, it is not just the time when they will learn algebra, geography, science, and English, it is the time when they learn to develop a trusting relationship with drugs (alcohol is a drug).

My colleagues and I have seen many adolescents and young adults who have developed substance abuse or addiction in a period of time as short as 6 months from their first experience of intoxication, or immediately if they are genetically predisposed to addiction.

You would think that school provides the necessary structure to inhibit this progression, but in reality, school is the “drug store” for many users.

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As a drug dealer told me during the summer, "I sell drugs and make a lot of money, but not right now because school is out." And just about any adolescent you meet today will tell you that they can buy drugs on their campus.

While this speaks to the risks for people who have not used drugs at this time, how does returning to school effect the person who is drug-abusing or addicted?

The answer is that they will not only continue to use drugs, but they will progress without treatment.

Many parents, who have been struggling with their child's behavior at home because of their drug use over the summer, erroneously believe that when their child returns to school, things will somehow all return to normal.

Many parents think returning to school means getting back to the books, studies, homework, the grindstone, and life. However, this is not what returning to school means for the drug user.

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For the drug user, returning to school is a time to reconnect with old friends, share "war stories" of the summertime parties, and diligently keep the summer alive by planning activities and parties on the weekends to use drugs. For some it is deciding where to get high at 4:20 p.m. ("420" is a time when drug-users use with the belief that it creates some sort of connection with everyone in the world getting high at that time or date) Visit my website to learn about "420".

If you are a parent, the easiest way to look at this for your child in treatment is that returning to school means returning back to old friends and places that might be associated with their drug use history. Any association with drug use history can be what we call a "Trigger for Relapse". It is important to be clear about your expectations and consequences for unmet expectations during this time.

COLLEGES ARE WORKING TO ADDRESS THE ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROBLEMS ON CAMPUS

California State University's adoption of a series of policy recommendations on alcohol use recently provided a window into current thinking around campus alcohol prevention

The Cal State recommendations give schools in the California system a lot of leeway in implementing changes, and some might argue that the policy document recommends more studies and meetings than proscriptive changes.

But by focusing on a broad range of environmental factors that influence alcohol use on campus, and calling for assessment of the changes that are implemented, the California school system is moving in the direction that experts like William DeJong, Ph.D., call the current state-of-the-art in campus alcohol prevention.

"Because of the publicity around alcohol-poisoning deaths, college administrators are feeling pressure to focus on this issue as never before," said DeJong, director of health and human-development programs at The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention. All over the country, he said, college presidents and other high-ranking officials are putting their considerable abilities and political connections to work in forming campus coalitions to work for environmental change.

Increasingly, educators have been adopting some of the innovative strategies coming out of the community prevention field, such as intervention education and social-norms marketing. Some schools, for instance, train students in coping strategies and refusal skills, while others conduct brief motivational-feedback interviews to show students how their drinking compares to the campus norm.

