

# Are the Children Well?



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COALITION

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## The Key to Prevention: Talk, Talk, Talk! Talking to your teen about marijuana

Recreational marijuana use is now legal in Massachusetts (for those aged 21 and over) and retail operations will be opening in a few short months selling a host of THC laced tinctures, creams, edibles and other products. With youth's perceptions of risk and harm of marijuana use at an all time low, what's the best way to keep our kids informed, safe, and empowered to make healthy choices?

**TALK, TALK, TALK —EARLY and OFTEN!**



**The #1 reason teens choose NOT to use drugs or alcohol is PARENTS!**

*"The #1 thing that teens say when they're asked 'Why are you not using drugs? What's holding you back?' is 'My parents expect me not to use them.' That's the #1 reason. It's still parental expectation."*

—Janet Williams  
(University of Texas Researcher)

**For more information and resources go to [tritowncouncil.org](http://tritowncouncil.org)**

### #1 BEFORE the talk



**Know the facts**—get credible info go to [tritowncouncil.org](http://tritowncouncil.org) or **Partnership for Drug-Free Kids**



**Be patient and ready to listen**—avoid criticism. Remember your goal is to have a conversation, not deliver a lecture.

**Set a positive example.** Model good behavior.

**Be clear about your message.** Talk early and often about drug (and alcohol) use.

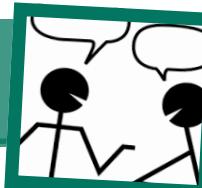
**Seek support:** Ask your health care provider to talk to your teen. Suggest your teen talk with other trusted adults (coaches, relatives, etc.)

### #2 BE PREPARED to answer their questions



- **Why don't you want me to use marijuana?**
- **What's the big deal about THC?**
- **It's legal so it must be safe...**
- **Did you ever use marijuana?**

### #3 THEN...start the conversation



**Find the right moment.**

Driving by a Weed Map billboard sign, after hearing or reading a story on the news, or passing by a retailer (yes it's coming!), ask your teens what **they** think about marijuana use. BTW, the car is often the perfect place to start these conversations!

**Appeal to their intellects.** What does the science tell us about marijuana use? Help your teen contrast marijuana use with other health choices ---even though 18 (or 21 in some cities) year olds can legally purchase and smoke cigarettes, does that mean they should?

**Make your message clear.** Don't treat pot lightly. State your expectations for your teen clearly and concisely.

**Discuss ways to avoid uncomfortable situations.** Practice comfortable refusal skills through role play.

**And FINALLY...**

Don't underestimate your power! Your voice matters! Believe it or not, your teen IS listening!



# Help Your Child Tackle Long-Term School Projects

## How Parents can Avoid Over-Involvement by Building the Capacity of Children and Teens to Engage Executive Function

by Stephanie Meegan

### Part 1: Getting Started

Multi-faceted **school projects** can be stressful for families. Particularly if youth find it difficult to **plan** and **organize** work tasks and **manage time** and **resources** independently. Some may avoid **getting started**, and find it hard to **sustain focus** and **overcome obstacles**. As deadlines loom and **tasks are unfinished**, young people can feel **overwhelmed**.

#### What is Executive Function?

A set of complex brain activities that work together to help us to ...

- manage daily routines
- control emotions
- achieve goals

Parents may be tempted to jump in and help complete the project, but such involvement doesn't address the underlying issues. For many, the core reason for project-related struggles is the uneven development of the youth's **Executive Function**.

Fortunately Executive Function skills can improve over time when **strategic coaching** is provided by teachers, parents or tutors.

Here are some **tips** for **beginning** the transition to **strategic coaching** to strengthen your child's project-related **Executive Function** skills.

#### TIP 1: Consider which Executive Function skill areas need strengthening.

Executive Function involves a variety of thinking and behavior regulation skills. If diagnostic testing has been done, clear indications of strengths and weaknesses have been determined. In the absence of formal evaluations, parents can complete the informal **Parent Questionnaire** on the next page and get a sense of the **project-related skills** that need attention.

#### TIP 2: Get a "heads up" from teachers when a Student Project is assigned.

To have time for coaching and avoid over-involvement as due dates approach, it is important to **know when a Student Project is assigned**. You and your child can **establish a weekly habit** of checking the Masconomet website where teachers post assignments on **Blackboard**. With upper elementary aged youth, ask teachers **how Student Project information** will be shared when assigned.

#### TIP 3: Clarify the target.

In the adult world of work, tools like **specifications** and **quality assurance criteria** are used to set expectations for product or project development. In education, teachers use **rubrics** to make it clear how **Student Projects** will be evaluated. Rubrics are often in chart form

where performance indicators or quality criteria for component parts are described on a scale of 1-4.

Along with the **general instructions** check for the **Project Rubric**. This tool helps children understand how their work will be evaluated. In addition, the rubric can guide them as they **check, correct** and **augment** their work before turning it in.

If the assignment is a **Group Project**, request guidelines that describe how **individual contributions** will be assessed. Often teachers provide a **Project Collaboration Rubric** or a **Feedback Survey**. These accountability tools describe **how group members are expected to work together**. When the project is done, these tools also enable youth to **document individual contributions** and **collaborative efforts**. Note: In high performing organizations, "360 degree evaluations" or similar tools are used to ensure individual accountability and reward effective collaboration and productivity.

#### TIP 4: Provide the right capacity-building support at the right time.

This chart shows when the different types of **thinking** and **behavior skills** are used to achieve a goal when the goal is a long-term project.

Steps to Goal Achievement	Executive Function Skills
1. I know <b>what</b> to do	Metacognition, Planning, Time Management, Organization & Working Memory
2. I know <b>how</b> to do it	
3. I begin	Response Inhibition, Emotion Regulation, Task Initiation, Time Management, Working Memory, Task Initiation & Metacognition
4. I work through each step	
5. I reflect on what is & isn't working, adapt & change as needed	Metacognition, Emotion Regulation, Flexibility & Goal-Directed Persistence
6. I stick with & complete the tasks	
	 Goal Achieved

Ask teachers for **suggestions** to help your child practice the Executive Function skills that are particularly challenging for him/her.

In addition to **extra help after school**, some children and teens may benefit from **tutoring or coaching in the application of Executive Function skills** as they work through a project.

### Part 2: For More How To Tips

**Next Step:** Attend Parent Workshop on Wednesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>.

For a program chock full of **specific tools**, more **useful tips** and **practical strategies** for School Projects, please mark your calendar, register and join us for the workshop. **PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED**

Executive Function Skills Used for Projects:  
Parent Questionnaire

**Part A: Thinking Skills**

**Directions:** Place a  beside the following behaviors that best describe your 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grader.

**Planning:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- follow complicated directions.
- figure out steps needed to complete long-term project.

**Organization:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- gather materials so they are available when needed.
- keep project instructions, resources, and research notes in order and ready to use.
- anticipate and schedule time for help from, or collaboration with, team members, teacher, library staff, parent, tutor, etc.

**Time Management:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- accurately estimate how much time a project task will take to do.
- spread tasks out over several days so project work is not left to the last minute.
- make adjustments to the monthly calendar and daily/weekly planner to accommodate adjustments to work plan.

**Working Memory:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- track next steps on the monthly calendar and weekly/daily planner.
- gather or bring home materials needed to accomplish the next project step.
- remember to ask peers or adults questions as needed.

**Metacognition:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- monitor how work is going and making adjustments.
- review the project and comparing the parts with the project requirements and rubric.
- check project for clarity, spelling, grammar, format, bibliography, visuals, etc.

**Part B: Behavior Regulation Skills**

**Directions:** Place a  beside the following behaviors that best describe your 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grader.

**Response Inhibition:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- ignore or eliminate distractions (social media, video games, siblings, noise) that make it difficult to concentrate and complete project tasks.
- slow down and focus so project tasks get done carefully.

**Emotion Regulation:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grader to ...

- bounce back when discouraged, frustrated or overwhelmed by obstacles.
- work through feelings constructively so they don't get in the way of project work.

**Task Initiation:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- start a project that will take sustained effort over time.
- initiate a project task that is difficult, time consuming or personally uninteresting.

**Flexibility:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- let go of what's not working and figure out another way to do something.
- be open to suggestions and ideas that don't align with what s/he wants.

**Goal-Directed Persistence:** It is hard for my 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grader to...

- maintain focus and not be sidetracked by tasks that are not critical or diversions that don't add value.
- finish all the steps to complete a project, including turning in the final product.

## Youth Marijuana Use Rates on the Rise; Vaping Rates “Considerable” National Survey Says

Since 1975, the **Monitoring the Future (MTF)** survey — created by researchers at the University of Michigan and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse — has measured drug, alcohol, and tobacco use and related attitudes among 8th, 10th and 12th grade youth.

The most recent survey conducted in 2017 is rife with hope and concern. Youth cigarette and tobacco use rates continue to decline. Vicodin use among 12th graders—the most common opioid used by adolescents—is at its lowest level since 2002 when it was first included in the survey, and adolescent heroin use rates continue to be extremely low.

However, rates of youth alcohol use—including binge drinking—leveled for the first time in several years and **marijuana use showed its first significant increase in 7 years**. Study investigators are not surprised by the uptick in youth marijuana use given the landscape of legalization and youth's declining perception of risk and harm of marijuana. MTF's Richard Meich reflects, “The increase has been expected by many. Historically marijuana use has gone up as adolescents see less risk of harm in using it. We've found that that the risk adolescents see in marijuana use has been steadily going down for years to the

point that it is now at the lowest level we have seen in 4 decades.”

The 2017 survey measured substance specific vaping use for the first time and report levels of vaping—both of nicotine and marijuana — are significant. Survey showed the highest rates of vaping among high school seniors — 1 in 10 12th grade youth report vaping marijuana and 1 in 5 report vaping nicotine in the past 12 months.

[Tritowncouncil.org](http://Tritowncouncil.org) has information on substance use and links/resources for talking to your teen. Click on the **Coalition** tab for more information.



## HOPE AND CONCERN Are Tri-Town Youth Using Marijuana?

(Data Source: 2016 YRBS)

### The HOPE & the NORM

- **Most** youth not using marijuana.
- 8 out of 10 high school youth do **NOT**
- 99% of middle school youth do not use marijuana

....EVERYONE IS **NOT** DOING IT!

### The CONCERN

- Significant misperceptions—6 out of 10 high school youth and 4 out of 10 middle school youth over-perceive peer use
- Youth use increases with age and grade level
- Half of high school youth **don't think** marijuana is risky and 5 out of 10 say their peers **don't** disapprove of marijuana use

**BTW, promoting the positive, healthy norm **MATTERS** because it empowers kids to **choose not to use!****

# Tri-Town Council Connects Girls for Mentoring

**Written by Aisha Fatima**

**Fluent in 3 languages, Masco senior Aisha Fatima writes articles for the Tri-Town Transcript via her Media Communications class. Aisha serves as a Girls 4 Girls mentor at Proctor School.**

Tri-Town Council is continuing with their Girls 4 Girls program for the year 2017-2018. It is designed for girls in grades 5 and 6 who are mentored by girls in grades 10, 11 and 12.

The purpose of the program is to provide young girls with a support system. The high school mentors act as friends with whom the younger girls can talk to.

"The relationship offers them the opportunity to have some fun, connect, laugh, be creative and physical as well as explore big ideas together -- talk about the joys and challenges of friendships, ask questions, explore being a girl in the world today, and who they are and who they want to become," said coordinator of Tri-Town Council's youth programs Meredith Shaw.

The mentors are responsible for guiding their girls. They are trained by Shaw and Topsfield fifth grade teacher Kim Boucher. Boucher works collectively with Proctor School Principal Sarah O'Leary and TTC in running the program.

"When the idea was brought to us, TTC jumped right on board because the Girls 4 Girls program is the embodiment of the mission of TTC, which is to strengthen the social and emotional well-being of Tri-Town youth and grow the prevalent "norm" of healthy decision making among our youth," said Shaw.

The mentors were taught how to make their mentee comfortable with them, and when to report to the adults if something concerning comes up in the talks.

The program, which started three years ago, has expanded to all three towns this year. The high school youth are placed into three batches who will mentor girls from elementary schools of all three towns. The mentoring program not only benefits the younger girls,

but is also a valuable experience for the high school mentors.

"Mentoring for the Girls 4 Girls program introduced me to a wonderful group of people who I had never spent time outside of school with. Meeting and getting to know the other mentors was great because I was able to expand my group of friends in a meaningful setting," said senior mentor Arianna Perry.

Shaw said that the mentors gain listening skills while learning how to offer advice and connect with others. "The older girls benefit because being a mentor allows them to reconnect with their younger selves and temporarily shed some of the stress of being in high school...I imagine the experience of being a mentor is shaping the women they are becoming in the world --- it's a win-win," she said.

Perry began as a mentor last year, and continued as a senior because of the positive experiences she had last year. "Developing a relationship with a younger girl, and being able to offer her advice and friendship, was rewarding and put a stressful junior year in the right perspective. My favorite part about the program is having the opportunity to teach girls to be proud of who they are, gain confidence, and most importantly to accept the other girls around them," said Perry.

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***- Arianna Perry***

The program is working hard towards making girls feel comfortable and confident before they step into middle school, which is a transition that makes many girls feel anxious. "It's a well known fact that in general girls' confidence peaks at around age 9 and drops



***Girls 4 Girls Program participants are getting to know each other as they kick off their mentoring year!***

soon after - during adolescence," said Shaw. "There are many variables that impact a girl's self esteem and confidence --- the transition from child to teen and figuring out who they are now and who they want to be, media images and messaging, internal and external expectations, changing relationships - the list goes on! When youth have opportunities to build positive relationships, it has impact on so many aspects of healthy development."

Young girls are often pressured to do things they might not feel comfortable to do in order to fit in. Connecting with a mentor can help them to understand those issues through girls who have been through that age and are aware of the issues they will face.

"I think the program has helped all of the girls in different ways. I think for our younger girls, having an older girl to talk with - who was their age not too long ago - is helpful. Connecting with an older girl also gives the mentees opportunities to ask questions and gain the perspective of someone who has been there," said Shaw.

It is suggested that parents place their girls in such programs so that they don't have to stress about their child feeling lost or disconnected from them. A program like this can also give them a understanding of the middle school life and how to deal with it before it all starts.



*The mission of Tri-Town Council (TTC) is to strengthen the social and emotional well being of tri-town youth and reduce and prevent at-risk behavior. Collaborating with parents, schools, youth, law enforcement, community organizations and area resources, TTC identifies needs and provides proactive solutions that support and empower youth to make healthy and safe decisions. TTC offers a variety of youth workshops, adult education programs, and afterschool enrichment - all grounded in the Developmental Assets framework.*

***The Coalition***, a program of Tri-Town Council, is a community partnership focused on achieving a measurable reduction in youth drug and alcohol use by establishing and maintaining an environment in which youth of all ages are encouraged and choose to be substance-free.

