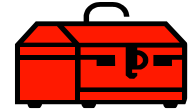


# CMH Toolbox

## Resources for building better lives.



Summer 2005

### Truancy: What is it?



With the inevitability of a new school year just around the corner, we thought we would address a very important school issue, TRUANCY. Truancy is the absence from instruction without valid excuse. The Compulsory Education Law states every child between the ages of 7 - 16 years must attend school.

There is a combination of factors that affect the student's absenteeism, including family challenges, school climate, economic conditions, language barriers, health matters, and individual student needs. Sometimes they are having difficulties with their schoolwork and are feeling discouraged. In some cases a young person may have a learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia) that has not been recognized. In many cases, young people avoid

school because they are being bullied, harassed or verbally abused (this can include sexual harassment or racial abuse). There is also a condition known as school phobia, which is a genuine fear of school.

Many students have patterns of absenteeism but are not considered truant because their absences were excused. However, if students are not in school (regardless of the reason), they miss out on a valuable education and are at risk of the same negative outcomes as those who are actually truant.

Absenteeism is detrimental to students' achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem, and employment potential. Clearly, students who miss school fall behind their

peers in the classroom. This, in turn, leads to low self-esteem and increases the likelihood that at-risk students will drop out of school. Research indicates that youth who are truant are more likely to drop out of school, making it more difficult to become productive citizens. Truancy has also been found to be associated with substance abuse, gang activity, and involve-

After a total of 7 unexcused absences, the school is mandated by law to contact the authorities.

ment in criminal activities such as burglary, auto theft, shoplifting, and vandalism.

A child may be excused for things like the child's doctor appointments, the child's illness, and a death in the family. Other

*(Continued on page 2)*

Inside this issue:	
Positive peer pressure	2
Helping children with ADHD	3
Calendar of Events Support Groups School Supplies Info.	4

### Getting ready to go back to school

The start of a new school year can be a fun and exciting time for children, but can also bring about feelings of anxiety and stress. Many parents will feel a bit of stress as well. Whether your child is preparing for a big

milestone, such as entering kindergarten or starting at a new school, or is just gearing up to start the next grade, here are some suggestions about how to help everyone in the family have a positive experience this fall:

**Prepare your child for new experiences by helping them know what to expect.** Plan a visit with your child to

*(Continued on page 3)*





## The Legal aspect of Truancy

(Continued from page 1)

reasons are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Unexcused absences are when a child stays home to baby sit a younger sibling, child refuses to attend, or the parent does not call the school and report the child will be absent. After the first three days of unexcused absences, for elementary students and three academic class periods on three days if the child is in middle school, junior

high and high school, the child is considered a "continuing truant." The school notifies the parent or legal guardian by mail of the unexcused absences. After a total of seven unexcused absences, the school is mandated by law to contact the authorities. In this county, the authority is Anoka County Community Corrections for children 12- 16 years old and Anoka County Child Protection for children under 12 years old.

While a child is between the ages of 7- 16, parents have a

legal obligation to ensure their child(ren) attends regularly at the school at which they are a registered pupil or provide alternative arrangements agreed by the school district.



## Positive Peer Relationships -

### Information for Teens & Parents

#### For Teens:

The start of a new school year is a good time for changes and new beginnings. Positive peer relationships can play a big role in new beginnings. Peer groups provide opportunities for practicing new behaviors and developing necessary social skills for future interactions. Peer pressures can range from positive influences, such as academic and athletic achievement, to negative influences, such as drug and alcohol use. Negative peer pressure has always been a factor in adolescence. However, the flip side is that there is also positive peer pressure. Studies of peer pressure indicate that most teenagers feel that their friends are likely to pressure them *not* to use drugs and *not* to engage in sexual activities. There are also positive pressures to participate and excel in

athletics, music and various other types of extracurricular activities. See your athletic director, community education coordinator, teacher, or dean at the beginning of the school year to get information and sign up for extracurricular activities.

#### For Parents:

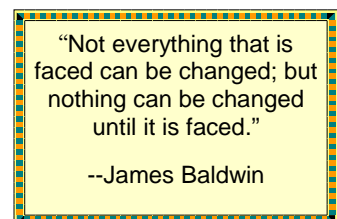
Family support is crucial to adolescents. Adolescents take their major values in life from their parents. When adolescents are negatively influenced by their peers, it is more likely because something is lacking in parental involvement. Those who do not have a high level of support from their parents are more likely to become involved in undesirable behaviors. Support and effective communication lessen adolescent's vulnerability to negative peer pressure.

Effective communication can take place at dinnertime or in the car.

Start out by asking simple questions, for example: How was school today? or How did you do on that test today? or What did you have for lunch today? You may get one word answers for a while but over time these questions can lead to other topics that your teen may bring up on their own. Communicating everyday for a short time each day will build confidence in your teen that you are interested and care. Patience and consistency is the key for parents. Building your communication line with your teen takes time and is so rewarding when you see the positive differences it makes in their lives.

For more information:

<http://inside.bard.edu>



"Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

--James Baldwin



## Getting Ready

(Continued from page 1)

the school to see the classroom(s), and find lockers, bathrooms, etc. Arrange for your child to meet his or her teacher and any support staff with whom your child might be working, such as school social workers, the school nurse or your child's dean. Children with special needs will especially benefit from knowing in advance who they can go to for help.



**Maintain a positive outlook.** Talk about the upcoming year in a cheerful and excited way. Children often mirror their parent's attitudes, whether they show it directly or not.

## Helping children with ADHD

by Dean Grauds, MA, LMFT, LPC

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurobiological disability characterized by poorly developed attention skills, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. It interferes with the ability to sustain focus on tasks and curb or delay impulsive behavior. If untreated, ADHD manifest in living difficulties such as school failure, difficulty with relationships, depression, and conduct disorder. A child with ADHD can disrupt family life, and strain the marital relationship.

Behavioral difficulties of children with ADHD are attributable to poor organization skills, impulsivity, inattention, difficulty in picking up social cues, excessive risk taking, unawareness of self/other

If you view the start of a new school year as an opportunity for good experiences and to master new skills, your child will be more likely to see things that way too.

A positive outlook should extend to handling problems too. Encourage your child to come up with some solutions when discussing worries. This helps to show that you will work together to solve problems. If you have specific concerns that you think may require extra help from your child's teacher or school support staff, talk with them in advance.

Plan schedules so that many tasks can be done the night before, such as packing lunches, picking out school clothes, preparing backpacks, signing permission slips, etc. Have your child help with these tasks whenever possible. Get a large bulletin board or calendar to note special days or

boundaries and the appearance of not listening. If undiagnosed and untreated, ADHD may result in more serious emotional and behavioral problems and antisocial behaviors and substance abuse.

Children with ADHD get labeled as difficult or with learning disabilities. Though these are serious, the most serious outcome of ADHD is that kids internalize their problems and, at a core level, become discouraged about self, their abilities and life in general. Discouragement becomes a self-reinforcing cycle as they fall behind and increasingly realize they cannot function as others can.

The good news is that a proper diagnosis and a multi-modal treat-

ment approach can change the

cycle of discouragement and dysfunction. The most effective treatment is: parent training in behavior management; family counseling; collaboration with the school to set up an appropriate learning program; and use of medication. Outcome studies of this approach have shown that positive changes can be realized and these children can succeed.

**Help your child get into a new routine by starting** earlier bedtimes and wake-up times a week or two before school the first day of school. **Consider starting special traditions to kick off the new year.** This might include preparing a favorite breakfast, having your child talk with grandparents or other relatives before heading out the door, keeping a photo record or journal, having a special family dinner at the end of the first day, or anything else that your child would look forward to.

Every family and every child is unique as to what will calm pre-school jitters and help them look forward to an exciting year. With some planning and support, we hope everyone will start the year off on a good note, looking forward to a year of fun and learning.



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*Dean Grauds, MA, LMFT, LPC is a therapist and co-director of West Lake Family Services Agency. The West Lake program is best known for their intensive in-home, ADHD program which assists families who have a child diagnosed with ADHD. West Lake also provides in-home family therapy, parent education and individual skills training.*



Brought to you by the  
Children's Mental Health  
Newsletter Committee;  
Sandy, Angie, Denise,  
Julie, Dixie and Gena



**ANOKA COUNTY CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH**

Rum River Human Service Center  
3300 4th Ave N. Bldg. #9  
Anoka, MN 55303

Phone: 763-712-2703  
Fax: 763-712-2728



Promote public awareness  
of mental illnesses with  
the silver ribbon.  
<http://www.nmha.org>

# Calendar of Events Call 763-712-2703 for more information

## July

July 4 - Independence Day

July 12 - Children's Mental Health Advisory Council (CMHAC) meeting at the Rum River HSC, Bldg #9 at 3:30 p.m.

## August

No CMHAC meeting this month

## September

September 5 - Labor Day

September 6 - School Starts!

September 13 - Children's Mental Health Advisory Council (CMHAC) meeting at the Rum River HSC, Bldg #9 at 3:30 p.m.

POST Workshops start this month. Call 763-712-2703 for more information.

## Support Groups

CHADD, Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders:  
<http://chadd.org> or call 800-233-4050 for more information

Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation: <http://www.bpkids.org>

MACMH, Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health, Parent  
Trainings and Support Groups: <http://www.macmh.org>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Caring for Every  
Child's Mental Health: <http://mentalhealth.org> or 800-789-2647

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\* **School supplies...**   
\*  
\* *If you need assistance,*  
\*  
\* • *Call your school district office or church to see if*  
\* *you qualify for any school supply program they may*  
\* *have.*  
\*  
\* • *If you have not received your school supply list, your*  
\* *local discount store should have lists available.*  
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