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Does your staff need time off from their time off?

Some of the work that I do with young people surrounds substance abuse prevention and making healthy choices. I, like many of you, have been directly affected by the poor choices that some of our young people make. Sadly, it has become commonplace for us to turn on the news and learn about yet another person who is killed or injured in a car crash or other accident. We sometimes later hear the proverbial words “police say alcohol was a factor.”

The national statistics tell us that by the time they are sophomores in high school, almost 50 % of young people have used alcohol at least once in their lives. The numbers also tell us that the earlier young people begin using substances, the greater their chances are of becoming dependent on that substance as an adult.

In my travels at camps around the country, I often find this topic to be a tough one for camp directors. Some deal with the problem head on by making a zero tolerance policy. Other camps that I work with allow their staff of age to drink on the property in a designated area away from the campers. Still another camp randomly breathalyses their staff when they return from nights out.; Anyone of legal age that is over the legal limit in that state is terminated. Anyone underage who registers **anything** on the Breathalyzer is terminated. There are many models out there of how to deal with these issues.

I pose these questions to you and your staff... What are you doing to educate your staff about their choices during their time off? Are you and your staff familiar with your state's Social Host Law? Are you completely educating your international staff about the alcohol laws and cultural differences? I remember being a young camp director at a residential camp when I had an international staff member walk into my cabin carrying a beer when camp was in session. After I picked my jaw off the floor, I realized it was my fault for not educating the staff well enough. What type of alternatives do we offer our staff for their time off? Are they really resting? Or are they getting in so much “party time” that they are lugga for the rest of a session? Does your substance use policy need to be revamped? The reality of it is that some of our staff members, when they arrive to us in the summer, have been using substances all year. Why would they suddenly stop using for the summer?

Please also keep in perspective that we are all prone to it. Residential or day camp. Specialty camp or generalist camp. I laughed out loud with one camp that I did work with a few summers ago. I told the camp director that I also did some work

surrounding substance use and asked them if they wanted me to talk about it in my training session with their staff. They had a staff of over 100 members. Their first response to me was “Oh, no, that’s not an issue for anyone here.” Needless to say... a pretty scary response.

So, as you are sitting down this winter and beginning to plan your training for next year, please consider building in an effective, thoughtful piece of your training around your staff making healthy choices. You may be saving a life or two in the process...

Happy Thanksgiving and Best Regards,

Steve