

# Our Kids at Risk

By Suze Hargraves

If you're a parent or caretaker of a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade child, you've got to take a look at the 2007 New Hampshire Department of Education's Youth Risk Survey ([www.ed.state.nh.us](http://www.ed.state.nh.us)). This report gives us an overall picture of what our kids are thinking about issues like drug and alcohol consumption, suicide, risk taking, sexuality, violence and other topics that give parents gray hair. For that matter, if you don't have gray hair before you read the report you probably will afterward. Let's look at some of the more terrifying statistics:

25.4% of the students rode one or more times during the past 30 days in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol.

18.1% of the students have carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on one or more of the past 30 days.

27.0% of the students were in a physical fight one or more times during the past 12 months.

24.6% of the students felt so sad or hopeless for almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some of their usual activities during the past 12 months.

26.6% of the students smoked cigarettes or cigars or used chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip on one or more of the past 30 days.

44.8% of the students had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days.

39.9% of the students used marijuana one or more times during their life.

12.8% of the students sniffed glue, breathed the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high one or more times during their life.

22.5% of the students were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property by someone during the past 12 months.

44.7% of the students stated they have had sexual intercourse.

24.3% of the students who had sexual intercourse during the past 3 months drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse.

Could those numbers be skewed by kids giving responses that make them "cool"? Sure. Are they an accurate picture of what's going on out there? Yes. Every day that your child walks out of your home they face life-altering choices. Without the right tools and healthy foundations, kids make these choices with the information available to them through their peers, the media and what little life experience they have. The statistics scream one single piece of advice: **TALK TO YOUR KIDS.**

If you don't know how to talk to your pre-teen or teen or find that every time you try it ends in a screaming match, there are many local resources to help. Near and dear to my heart is the Teen Clinic at White Mountain Community Health Center led by Patricia Jacobson. Trish speaks "teen" fluently. She's ready, willing and able to make every possible effort to see that your child does not become a statistic. The Teen Clinic (Thursdays from 2:30-5:30) is a safe place for teens to get answers to the many questions facing them on a daily basis.

Valley Outreach at [www.forparentssake.com](http://www.forparentssake.com) is another superb resource for parents of children of all ages. This website is one-stop shopping for parenting resources. At this site you'll also find links to [www.mvparents.com](http://www.mvparents.com). If you're a parent and you haven't explored these sites you need to do some clicking. You're not alone in your quest to raise happy, healthy, well-adjusted kids. Help is as close as your computer or phone.

Mount Washington Valley has many wonderful resources at our disposal, but none is more precious and worth more investment than our children. Yes, they drive us crazy at times and no, we don't always understand them, but it's our job to provide them with the solid foundations they need to be successful adults.

Reach out to your kids. Reach out to the many resources available to help you and your family as your child journeys out into our scary world. The more you reach out, the easier the daunting task of parenting will become.

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