

# CORAL GABLES GAZETTE

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Parents first line of defense against drug abuse

In response to the recent article *Family involvement key to insuring success for students* (Feb. 7-13), I urge that parents stay involved not only for the sake of their children's education but also for any sign of substance or alcohol abuse. According to Patricia Sedano "research shows that when families get involved, their children...are better behaved and have more positive attitudes."

Studies have also found that family engagement is a successful predictor of keeping teens off drug use. "Setting boundaries" is a parenting technique not only critical during the adolescent years, but also needed from a teen's perspective.

Interestingly, when asked by Roper Starch Worldwide in 1998 to rank major problems

facing America today, students aged 12 to 19 most frequently named as one of their top concerns "lack of parental discipline."

The reality is that underage drinking (young people ages 12 through 20) accounts for 20 percent of all alcohol consumed in the U.S. according to a report released by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA).

Apart from the referenced disturbing statistics, what is most disconcerting is what research has confirmed: teens have easy access to alcohol because parents are too often unwitting co-conspirators who see underage drinking as a rite of passage. According to Zailckas, "parents don't always have the education to make the right choices."

Informed Families (IF) is working to ensure parents and teens do "have the education to make the right choices" and begin to take serious steps in accepting each other's responsibilities in the fight against drug, alcohol, and tobacco. IF also helps parents send appropriate messages to their children.

As a professional specializing in adolescent substance abuse issues, I encourage all parents to stay involved in their children's education not only in the area of homework and test scores but also in the area of substance and alcohol abuse. It's the best investment a parent can make.

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