On Election Day 2016, Massachusetts residents voted to legalize marijuana for adult use. With the yes vote on Question 4, the Bay State joined seven other states in legalizing pot for recreational purposes. On December 15, 2016, anyone who is 21 or older can possess and consume marijuana. It is still illegal for anyone under age 21.

The great concern for Rhode Islanders is the increased availability of marijuana products (marijuana edibles) just over our border. Marijuana edibles, food or beverages infused with THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, are sold as “medibles” at medical marijuana dispensaries, but they don’t look like medicine. They look like brand-name candy bars, lollipops, Gummy Bears, fruit drinks, or bakery items — and that poses a risk to young children who may be exposed to them. The Denver Post reported on March 21 that the number of children coming into Colorado’s largest pediatric emergency department after accidentally eating marijuana edibles is on pace to more than double last year’s total. Most of the children admitted were between 3 and 7 years old.

A Public Health Caution
In addition to the risk of accidental ingestion by children or not-so-accidental use by teens, the marijuana edibles industry is also drawing the attention of public health officials and legislators, especially in states that have legalized or plan to legalize the recreational use of marijuana. In Colorado, which legalized recreational marijuana last year, marijuana edibles sales topped $500 million, yet the industry and its products are virtually unregulated.

Public health experts raise these concerns about marijuana edibles:

- Packaging is kid-friendly but not child-resistant, and once the product is out of the package, it’s virtually impossible to tell the difference between an off-the-shelf treat and a THC-infused edible.

- Warning labels about dosage limits are often missing. This creates a greater risk of overdose because, for example, consumers “assume” a whole candy bar is one serving, but the THC infused candy bar, typically the same size as a regular candy bar, has four to six servings.

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Suicide Concerns for Our Youth
Contributed by D. Jon Jelley, Executive Director, Boys Town New England

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for people 15-24 years old. Experts believe that statistics would be higher if other forms of self-destruction—drug overdoses, self-administered poisonings, some fatal one-car accidents—were taken into account. Suicide is a problem that, as a parent, you can’t ignore.

There is no sure-fire way of detecting suicidal thoughts in your teen. But there are behavior patterns—warning signs—that may point toward suicidal thoughts. Learn to recognize them, and more importantly, learn to talk with your teen about them.

Warning Signs

- A previous attempt. This warning sign may seem obvious, but eight of ten suicide attempts involve people who have tried to kill themselves before.
- Threats or conversations about death. Seven of ten who attempt suicide had told someone that they wished to die, saying things such as, “I’d be better off dead,” or “You all would be better off without me.”
- Problems in school, especially sudden problems, such as a drop in grades, falling asleep in class, emotional outbursts, or withdrawal.
- Fear of punishment or parental criticism.
- Problems with alcohol or other drugs.
- Changes in physical appearance or habits, disturbed sleeping and eating habits, depression, expressions of low self-esteem.
- Detachment from family and friends.
- Giving away personal possessions.
- Lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities.
- Statements of hopelessness.

It is not true that talking about suicide will give the idea to your child. In fact, not discussing your fears with your child is far riskier because he or she may take that as a sign that you don’t care. Some tips on how to talk with your teen.

How to Help

- Listen.
- Express love and sympathy.
- Validate your child’s feelings.
- Acknowledge his or her fear and pain.
- Keep door open for conversation, even if your child denies thinking about suicide.
- Monitor your child’s behavior for warning signs.
- Encourage your child to get involved in a group at school or church: sports, drama, music—anything that helps him or her feel connected to others.

There are more than 200 suicide prevention centers throughout the U.S. Calling the Boys Town National Hotline at 1-800-448-3000 can put you in touch with someone who can help — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Your Life Your Voice is another resource provided by the Boys Town National Hotline. This website offers kids and families the opportunity to ask questions via phone, text, chat or email. Let your kids know they are not alone, support is available.

Samaritans of Rhode Island 24/7 crisis line, 401-272-4044 or 800-365-4044. Or in an emergency, call 911.

Youth Voice: Be Great for Nate

By Angel Duclos, Vice President of Every Student Initiative (ESI)

After the unexpected passing of our close friend Nathan Bruno many of us were grief-stricken and sorrowful. Months after the passing, the habitual feeling of grief that many of us shared, was something we were afraid to talk about.

Before this group was known as ESI many of us sat in a basement talking about our feelings towards Nathan, the school, and even others around us. These conversations were a coping mechanism for us. The realization that we’re not the only ones feeling this sorrow grew an unbreakable bond between all of us.

The past summer was really what set us all in stone; over break many of us would hang out and grew even closer. This growth allowed us to turn the passing of a dear friend into a powerful movement. Our goal is to make sure that the pain and loneliness pushed on us and Nathan will never happen to another student and that every student is cared for within their school and community. Most recently we continued to grow together when we were invited to attend a special dedication at The Nest at Tenth Gate (Yoga Center located on East Main Road in Portsmouth). We had fun during Drums Alive and then reflected on ourselves during yoga and meditation. To learn more about The Nest and Tenth Gate Yoga Center, visit www.tenthgateyogacenter.com

Portsmouth’s Every Student Initiative was founded by high school sophomores in 2018, after the unexpected passing of their close friend. They believe the cornerstone to creating the next generation of innovative members of society is by creating a system in which thoughts and emotions are shared, and teamwork is a priority. Learn more at www.everystudentinitiative.org
Overconsumption can cause extreme anxiety, panic attacks, or psychotic reactions, including extreme paranoia. Consumers have a right to a warning.

Unlike the food and beverage industry in general, the production of marijuana edibles isn’t regulated. There is no FDA oversight because marijuana is still classified as an illegal drug under federal statutes. State laws, including Rhode Island’s medical marijuana act, focus on the plant and its derivatives, such as hash and oils. They do not regulate production of marijuana edibles or set rules for advertising to ensure they do not appeal to youth. A recent article in The New England Journal of Medicine titled “Half-Baked — The Retail Promotion of Marijuana Edibles” summarized the public health threats of unregulated THC-infused edibles by saying, “As legalization of marijuana spreads, new adopters should ensure that their regulatory scheme for marijuana edibles is fully baked.”

In Local New England News

January 20, 2019 marked the opening day of sale of recreational Marijuana in Massachusetts. The store happens to be VERY close to the Rhode Island border, in Fall River, MA. The store is 500 feet from Newport County, Rhode Island. It is very important that every Rhode Islander whether you are a parent or not, is aware of this recent development.

The time is NOW, to remain cautious about how Rhode Island will respond to this issue of legalization of recreational or retail Marijuana sales. Please inform your community, neighbors and youth — keeping the discussion open allows for the facts to be heard and could prevent future substance use and abuse.

Social Media: A Threat to Prevention, or a Tool for Success?

By Corey Silvia, MPA, Coordinator of Portsmouth Prevention Coalition

The Definition of Social Media
Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content, and /or to participate in social networking, the facilitation and sharing of ideas and information to build communities and virtual networks. With the addition of social media-linking website, almost every online experience can be connected to social media.

What Sites are Teens Using?
Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok (former name musical.ly) are just some apps used. Not only will they sign up for these sites with their own names, but they will also make fake accounts so its harder for parents to see or track what they are looking at on these specific sites.

What Content They are Viewing?
Many teens use these sites to see challenges whether it be a selfie challenge, vaping challenge, or any other risky behaviors that could be very dangerous to their health or even death. From these viewings, the advertisements then adjust to that specific content. For example, if a teen is searching a vape challenge, then the advertisements will focus on vape products etc. The idea is that teens are very interested in getting followers and ‘likes’. The more ‘likes’ you have the better the following, the more advertisements, and the cycle continues.

How Does Social Media Effect Prevention?
Teens are exposed to direct advertising on social media, without even knowing it! Youth withdraw themselves from their surrounding world, and begin to only understand behaviors through social media.

Prevention workers combat strong cultural waves on social media by viewing the same content that youth are viewing. By viewing what the teens are viewing, you are better able to understand the complicated, supportive web that social media offers to substance users. Developing positive social media campaigns, tagged with negative hashtags. Create online communities that youth want to be apart of — social media has always been a creative space.

Parents need to be aware, ask their kids questions, get to know what they are doing on social media. Get to know their friends and their friends parents — seems like an easy way to get to know someone, but with increasing pressures and schedules, this simple gesture seems to be put on the ‘back burner’.

Edibles — continued from page 1

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Trending Lingo: Crossfading

Using alcohol and marijuana at the same time is referred to as “crossfading.” (also “crossed” and “faded”)

Using alcohol and marijuana in combination is more likely to make the individual overuse both substances. It is common for an individual to experience the effects of marijuana more severely when they already have alcohol in their system. Crossfading is dangerous is because everyone’s body responds to alcohol and marijuana in different ways.

**Alcohol is a depressant and slows down the central nervous system. Marijuana also slows the body down. Using them concurrently will magnify the effects of both, but by HOW much is highly unpredictable.**

Having alcohol in your blood can also potentially cause your body to absorb the THC faster. Based on information from Australia’s National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC), in vulnerable people, the combination can produce psychotic symptoms such as panic, anxiety, or paranoia. Additionally, marijuana suppresses the body’s reaction to vomit or expel toxins from your system, the toxic effect of alcohol is kept in the body which could turn dangerous or even death.

The separate effects of alcohol and marijuana use on the body are pretty much fully documented. Not as much is known about the combined effects. According to data from Northeastern University, these can vary from person to person. When used together, the likelihood of having a bad reaction increases significantly, according to the NCPIC. Mixing alcohol with any substance, legal or not, can intensify the side effects and create negative interactions.

In 2019 methods of ingesting higher potency THC, the psychoactive chemical in marijuana, such as dabbing, vaping or edibles and then mixing with alcohol needs to be studied further.