



NEWSLETTER

March (well, the end of February) certainly blew in like a lion; due to the weather we had to postpone the Middle School Night at Solaris til April 10th (please see page 6 for more info). Meanwhile, our next coalition meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 23rd. It will be held at the Sparkle Lake Community building from 4-5 PM. These meetings are a great way to bring your input to the ASK table. If you can, please attend. All are welcome!

This month we have a new column joining the paper, "Family Dinners Make for Safe Kids". If you're looking for some ideas to get your kids to willingly join you for dinner, or some information on why family meals are so important, read on. And if you missed last month's newsletter, please read the [guest editorial](#) at LoHud.com.

As ever, if there's something you would like to contribute for the newsletter, just contact Cindy at Justask_ask@yahoo.com, or Cathy at ASK4Kids@gmail.com.

Tricy Cushner, President Cathryn Martin, Director Cynthia Cervini, Newsletter Editor

Calendar

**Tuesday,
March 23rd
4-5 PM**

*Coalition
meeting,
Sparkle Lake
Community
Building*

**Monday,
March 29th
through
Friday,
Apr 2nd**
Spring Break

Coming Soon: ASK Public Service Announcement Contest

If you're a student aged 10-19, it's time to get your creative juices flowing for a chance to win great prizes and save lives at the same time! We're looking for the best student-created public service announcements (or PSA's) - they can be video, audio, and/or print - to help us inform teens about the dangers of substance abuse, gambling, sexting, texting while driving, gang involvement, internet safety, peer pressure, eating disorders, and other destructive behavior. A PSA is a free advertisement that informs the public about safety and health information, community services or public affairs.

There will be five winners chosen from each of the three categories: video, audio and print (to include drawings, photos or advertisements). In addition to cash and prizes, the winning videos, audios and print PSA's will be distributed to the media to start airing on local television, radio and in newspapers.

This is an invaluable community service which will have an impact on many families. A small group can make a big difference.

Family Dinners Make for Safe Kids

By Cathryn Martin

One of the reasons you're reading this newsletter is that you're concerned about keeping kids safe. Life can be overwhelmingly busy these days between jobs, kids' activities, and keeping the household moving, but there's one thing that protects kids more than anything else: family dinners.

CASA (the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University) compared two groups of teens: those who had two or fewer family dinners per week, and those who ate dinner with their families five or more times per week. Those at the lower end of the family dinner scale were:

- three times more likely to try marijuana
- two-and-a-half times more likely to smoke cigarettes, and
- one-and-a-half times more likely to drink alcohol.

On the other hand, teens who ate frequently with their families often said that their parents were proud of them, that they could confide in their parents about a serious problem, and that there were lower levels of family tension than among those who rarely ate together. Sometimes it's tough to figure out the logistics of a family

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Overreaction is Underrated

By Cynthia Cervini

My twelve year old son (The ‘Shot’) has a fascination with my skeletal structure, particularly my backbone. It has nothing to do with my spine but more about the idea – in his mind- that I’m not afraid of anything or anybody. I also have no compunction about setting him, his sister (or, for that matter, their father) straight if necessary.

He’s wrong. I am afraid. I’m afraid of a lot of things. Working with teenagers for fourteen years I’ve seen how many things can go wrong and how quickly situations can deteriorate. When my kids were little I tortured the professionals around me - other counselors, psychologists, social workers, SROs - for the magic answer: how do you keep your kids out of trouble and on track academically? (I wish [this](#) editorial by Joseph Califano at CASA had been available back then.) As you can imagine, there is no magic answer but I’ve slowly realized that you can’t let the little things go. While I’m a firm believer in the ‘pick your battles’ approach to parenting, to not fly off the handle (although they’d argue that) if one of them leaves the refrigerator door ajar or doesn’t clean up after themselves (it would be a constant siege in that case), but both my sixteen year old daughter and The Shot would attest that I pull backbone over seemingly innocuous events.

Case in point. During the February break I was in Florida while their father was home keeping everyone alive (forget about housekeeping, errands, paying bills etc. If I come home to find that he, the kids, and the dog are alive it has been a successful trip). My daughter went shopping with a friend for a dress which was to do double duty for a sweet sixteen party that weekend and attending her uncle’s wedding this August. Maybe it was a result of this elusive (perhaps non-existent) double-duty dress, but what should have been a two hour trip to the mall with her friend Ariel’s sister driving morphed into an unauthorized, highly questionable five hour, two county, three mall road trip. When I phoned home to find out she was already an hour overdue on her extended return time I was not happy. When she didn’t answer her phone I was livid. The message I left her sounded something like this: “Kelsey, this is Mom,” (although I guess she knew that). “It is 8 o’clock. You’ve got exactly fifteen minutes to call me back before I call Ariel’s mother.” While Ariel was not a close, long term friend, she had stayed with us in Florida over the December holiday break and I still had her mother’s phone number. I waited thirteen minutes and then called Ariel’s mother. She was quite distressed because **she had no idea where her daughter was.**

Say *what*??

At the very same time the call waiting feature indicated my daughter was trying to call. I assured Ariel’s mother that from fifteen hundred miles away I would straighten this out immediately (I might have alluded to the fact that had I been around this wouldn’t have happened in the first place). I’ll spare everyone the litany of my out-of-control rant but suffice to say that my daughter, who unlike my son is decidedly NOT scared of me, did not argue and readily gave in to my demands (*you leave the mall this instant and you call me every ten minutes until you step foot in the house*). So every ten minutes for the next forty that it took to get home from the mall she dutifully phoned me, subjecting herself to my continued wrath. During the second or third call I ordered her to put Ariel on the phone so I could hear for myself that Ariel was going to call her mother (despite promising me that she would, Ariel never did call her mother which has resulted in me putting Ariel ‘on the shelf’. My daughter wouldn’t be spending any time with her outside of school from that point on).

Did I overreact? Yes and no. There were some questionable stories surrounding that ‘say yes to the dress’ event. Ariel’s sister was supposed to have driven them, but after speaking with Ariel’s mom it seems that her older daughter was home and a ‘friend’ of the sister’s drove them without anybody’s knowledge or consent. Which mall(s) were they at? My daughter claims they were at the Middletown Galleria, my husband swears she told him Poughkeepsie Galleria. She was an hour and a half later than the time my husband told her to be home, which had been extended at least once of the course of the evening. Sure it could have been worse; she was only at the mall.

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What's on My Nightstand

Beautiful boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction

by David Sheff

Review by Joan Landzberg



Joan's nightstand

This book takes the reader on a haunting, poignant, and personal journey through Sheff's son's nightmare descent into drug addiction, including spare and unflinching reporting of the terrible toll the addiction had on family and friends.

The book starts with the happy anticipation of Nic's birth, and moves through his boyhood in a near-idyllic town in California. In high school this "beautiful boy" was a varsity athlete and honor student – in many ways, a charmed child. An incident involving marijuana is rationalized as "experimentation". But, as Sheff writes of his adult son in the introduction, "He is brilliant and wonderful and charismatic and loving when he's not using, but like every addict I have ever heard of, he becomes a stranger when he is, distant and foolish and self-destructive and broken and dangerous."

Sheff follows his son through a decade of loss of self to drugs, unable to grasp the enormity of the problem and faulting himself for not acting decisively when he still had control over his son's future. It is only when his reporter's instinct takes over and walks along with his deep and abiding love for his son, that he is able to investigate meth, Nic's drug of choice, learning of its destruction, and exploring treatment.

At the end of the book, Nic has been
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Overreaction is Underrated

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She didn't stay out all night or tell us she was over at a friend's when she was actually at a drinking party. Yes, I overreacted, but on purpose. I don't want her for a second thinking that if she can get away with the small stuff, to start looking around for the next big challenge. Don't even get me started on Ariel, her shopping cohort. That Ariel could trick her mother and remain AWOL for hours on end, and later defy my instruction to call her mom ... suffice it to say this is not a person I want my daughter to develop a deep, abiding friendship with. As I told Jim (from karate, my parenting alter ego), our kids are only as good as their worst behaved friends - not unlike 'the weakest link' theory. Ariel is decidedly different than my daughter's other friends and while Kelsey isn't of the age where I can totally remove her from this girl, I can make it difficult for them to get together.

If I could go back and reassure my younger self, the one who tortured the professionals for the magic bullet, I would show her the [editorials](#) and tell her, like I tell my colleagues with young children, to watch their friends and make sure you are comfortable with them – sort of a 'birds of a feather' theory of parenting. Get them involved, in scouting, clubs, sports, religious organizations; cook (and eat) dinner with them.

Maybe I'll start a new trend... how about "overreact is the new black"?

Cynthia Cervini is a guidance counselor and parent who thinks that overreacting brings out the color of her eyes.

We've got a winner!

ASK has just taken on our first intern and instead of saving the best for last we got it right the first time.

Stephanie Hines, a senior at Walter Panas High School, began her affiliation with ASK as a member of Youth Court in 2007. As Stephanie explains, "the experience has broadened my horizons in the field of law and I will hopefully be advancing into a similar career in my future."

One of Stephanie's responsibilities is to work with the Director of Youth Court in assigning cases and assisting with training for members. She's also working with the Police Department (see photo), and helps with essential clerical work at ASK. This fall, Stephanie will attend the University of New Haven where she plans to major in criminal justice with a minor in sociology. Thank you, Stephanie, and welcome aboard!



Detective George Davis showing Stephanie how to process fingerprints

What's on My Nightstand – Beautiful Boy ...**Cont'd from page 3**

out of another rehab for a year. He has not relapsed. He has a job and a girlfriend. He has also written a book, *Tweaked*, the story of his drug addiction from his point of view.

Sheff provides over three pages of resources for parents of addicts. His main piece of advice: that the best step for parents to take is quick action to keep their child's "experimentation" from becoming tragic life-altering drug abuse.

Joan Landzberg, Ed.D, is VP of ASK

Other Recommendations for your Nightstand

A couple of my favorite parenting books... available for loan, rabbit-eared and all:

Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall? By Anthony E. Wolf, PhD.

How to Raise a Drug-Free Kid. The Straight Dope for Parents. By Joseph A. Califano, Jr.

Parenting for Prevention. How to Raise a Child to Say No to Alcohol/Drugs. By David J. Wilmes.

Tricy Cushner is mother of three teen/preteens.

Family Dinners Make for Safe Kids**Cont'd from pg 1**

meal, so we thought that a column with some suggestions might help. Here are a few starting points:

Get your kids' help in making dinner. If your kids help plan and make the meal, they'll be very likely to be enthusiastic about eating together.

If you'll be away until shortly before dinner, pull out the crockpot. A meal that's been slowly cooking away for hours can fill the house with wonderful scents - and possibly elicit a "Mom/Dad, that smells fabulous!" , which is never a bad thing!

Put the silverware away and eat with your hands. Well, maybe with a serving spoon or two. Tacos, sandwiches, cups of soup – dinner doesn't have to be complicated. And with a dinner like tacos, there's something about sitting across the table from your kids with all of you building your own customized meals that's fun as well as bonding.

Looking for a suggestion? How about a potato bar? Baked potatoes are the foundation, and you can put out a huge array of potential toppings: shredded cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, provolone, gruyere, parmesan, maybe blue cheese – whatever you like), sour cream (and/or yoghurt), cottage cheese, chopped lunch meats (turkey, ham, etc.), crumbled bacon, lettuce, spinach, avocado, chopped grape tomatoes (less juicy than other tomatoes), salsa, sunflower seeds or chopped walnuts, chopped hard boiled eggs, and don't forget the salt and pepper. Fresh herbs such as parsley and basil would work well, too. Take a look through your fridge; you might find some other items that would work as well – it's a great way to use up leftovers.

If you want to make them double-baked, after the initial baking slice the potatoes in half, and scoop the flesh out into a large bowl (taking care to leave the skins as intact as possible). Add some – or all – of the toppings you want to the potatoes in the bowl, blend well, and heap the mix back into the shells. Pop them back into the oven at 375 degrees for 10-15 minutes and you should be all set.

And all those little bits of leftovers at the end of the meal? Together they could make a great Cobb or chef's salad the next day.

The main thing is to have your family together around the table, enjoying a meal you've all participated in making, and getting to learn a little more about each other's day. It might seem like a simple thing, but it's a huge part of the safety net that will help protect your kids throughout their life.

Cathryn Martin is Director of ASK. She spent a couple of years as a restaurateur, and is delighted to be with ASK.



The Alliance for Safe Kids (ASK), Inc.

Invites ALL 6th, 7th and 8th Graders to a

Music and Sports PARTY

Hosted by

Solaris Sports Clubs

201 Veterans Road, Yorktown Heights

on

Saturday, April 10th

7-10 pm

The event will include:

A Music and light show by DJ Kevy K

Non-stop Volleyball and Basketball

**Call ahead or email to get on the VIP List and
pay only \$5 when you arrive!**

The event is limited to the first 300 registrants. If you do not pre-register, the entrance is \$10 provided the event is not already sold out.

**Register now by calling The Alliance for Safe Kids at 736-1450 or
emailing them at ASK4Kids@gmail.com.**

The event will be supervised by members of ASK, Solaris Sports Club and members of the Yorktown Leos Club. Any parents interested in helping, PLEASE contact ASK.

All proceeds to benefit The Alliance for Safe Kids, Inc, a 501(c)(3) Yorktown-based organization dedicated to keeping our kids out of harm's way.