



Safe Harbor says teen substance abuse on the increase during pandemic

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Safe Harbor is partnering with Curtis Liquors while it continues to fight to keep kids safe as they navigate through a period of increased anxiety and free time

As we endure this global health crisis, it is important to remember to keep in mind our mental health as well.

With students across the state learning last week that they would not be back in the classrooms until at least next September, frustration and cabin fever might reach an all-time high.

Trapped in their homes with more free time than ever, Safe Harbor is concerned that kids may turn to alcohol and other substances to pass the time.

Nicole Balaschi, director of Safe Harbor Cohasset, warns that parents should be cautious, as her organization has seen a rise in teen drinking around town as we enter month two of the quarantine.

“There are a ton of students who are expressing that they are very anxious right now,” Balaschi said. “And we’re seeing some of them begin to self-medicate with alcohol.”

Unfortunately, at a time when kids have more opportunity to use alcohol, they are also finding it in their homes in greater and greater abundance.

Alcohol sales have exploded since the beginning of the stay at home order, with a number of local liquor stores and other agencies sharing with Balaschi reports of increased traffic.

“There’s more alcohol in homes right now and more time for the youth to access it,” noted Balaschi.

Continuing its mission to combat youth substance use and properly educate students on its dangers, Safe Harbor has once again partnered with Curtis Liquors.

Through a state grant, Safe Harbor obtained 30 bottle locks, which will be distributed to interested patrons at Curtis Liquors.

The bottle locks feature a combination scroll lock, and are placed over the top of any liquor bottle to prevent unwanted openings.

A hard-line measure to prevent kids from using alcohol, Balaschi said the best way to prevent substance abuse is still through conversation.

“We are prompting parents to start conversations at home, they have the time,” said Balaschi. “It’s hard because there are some parents that are working from home, but to have the conversations and set boundaries now, talking about what their expectations are about alcohol, is important.

“If they can start setting boundaries and consequences and having open dialogue, its super helpful,” she said.

Understanding will also be important during this time for parents, as many kids are struggling with the loss of their school year.

Balaschi reports that in conversations with Safe Harbor’s Youth Ambassadors, who have continued to meet regularly over Zoom, she has found “heartbroken” and “deflated” students.

“It’s hard right now for the leaders, and really all students,” Balaschi said.

Despite continuing to show up for regular meetings, Balaschi says that leaders are open about their motivation “plummeting.”

“They’re all saying it’s really hard to get in the mindset to do work or projects when they don’t know when they’ll be able to complete them.”

With everything that is going on, students are having to deal with an unexpected isolation, and especially for seniors, a separation from friends with whom they were supposed to share so many great memories with this spring.

Safe Harbor continues to try to help, but is certainly faced with their own social distancing challenges.

While in-person meetings are out the window, Safe Harbor continues to do everything it can to stay connected.

“When we can’t connect the community in the ways that we usually do, it’s a lot harder,” admitted Balaschi. “We’re just trying to get information out in all avenues we can: social media, our newsletter, and through weekly updates.”

The latest push in this information campaign has been awareness of not only potential youth alcohol use, but other substances that kids may be turning to during the quarantine.

The nutmeg challenge

One such substance is regularly found in most pantries, but has proven to be dangerous thanks to a recent social media trend.

“There’s something called the ‘Nutmeg Challenge,’” Balaschi said. “It pops up every 5-10 years, and now with social media, it spreads very rapidly.”

The challenge involves drinking nutmeg in order to get a high. Though it may seem innocuous, Balaschi said it can have some very dangerous effects.

“The majority of people who try to drink it end up having a panic attack because they take too much,” Balaschi said. “The nutmeg then enhances any underlying mental health issues, whether its anxiety or depression or anything else.”

Balaschi warns that though it may not be in Cohasset yet, parents need to be on the lookout.

“Our Youth Ambassadors reached out to say that they’ve seen it on Tik Tok and Snapchat,” Balaschi said. “I’m not sure how prevalent it is in Cohasset, but very prevalent among the youth in general. It seems to be a side effect of everyone being at home and not having access to vapes or marijuana or whatever else what they would use.”

Prescription drugs

The other ever-present issue that Safe Harbor is calling attention to is prescription drugs in the home.

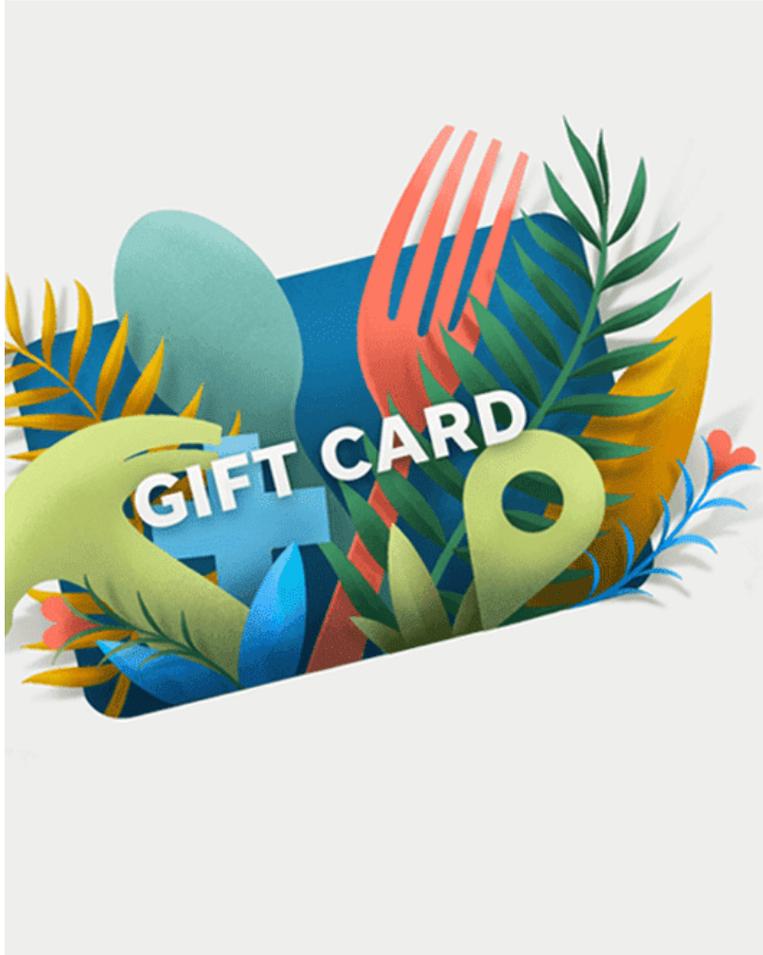
Balaschi says that one of Massachusetts bi-annual Drug Take-back Days, which is usually scheduled for April, has been canceled due to the pandemic.

In an effort to help residents get excess pills out of their homes, Safe Harbor has procured a number of terra bags, which allow for safe disposal of the pills at home.

Balaschi says that Safe Harbor will deliver the pouches to anyone who is interested, while of course maintaining safe social distancing.

As weeks turn to months in the stay-at-home order, we all have a responsibility to help maintain each other’s mental health and safety.

Safe Harbor will continue to be an outlet for those in need as much as possible during the quarantine.



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