PLYMOUTH, WIS.
REVIEW
NOV 20 1975

# More parental help needed

# Drug education

By Steve Lund
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Drug education in Plymouth's schools may be headed in a new direction.

Clarence "Cabby" Wild, drug education coordinator at Plymouth high school, says he thinks the schools will have to get parents and the community more involved in dealing with drug problems because educating students to the dangers of drug use has not been as successful as he had hoped.

Not that the program has been a complete failure. There are some signs that marijuana use is decreasing, he adds, although he thinks it is being replaced by increased alcohol consumption by high schoolers. It also appears that drugs such as amphetamines are decreasing in popularity.

The education program, however, has not been successful in convincing a substantial number of students that smoking marijuana is harmful to them, particularly in their adolescence when their bodies and minds are growing so rapidly.

"I'm convinced that marijuana has been harmful to a lot of people who have come through Plymouth high school," said Wild. "I don't like to see that happen."

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There is evidence on both sides of the coin as far as marijuana's bad effects are concerned, but Wild thinks the research indicating marijuana is not harmful is much less convincing than the evidence that it is harmful.

He recently acquired a video tape of the WFRV-TV "Inquiry" program in which an east coast biology professor said his research indicated marijuana is much more dangerous than alcohol.

The professor, Dr. George Russell, said he had found evidence of brain damage from smoking marijuana and that, while alcohol is metabolized through the body in 24 hours, marijuana is retained in the system and accumulates in fatty tissue just like the chemicals DDT or PCB.

Russell said the tissue damage from smoking one joint of marijuana a day for three months is equivalent to 30-40 years of normal alcohol use.

Whether Russell's experiments and data are well done, and whether his statements about brain damage are accurate, aren't really the issues, however.

Wild, in his many years as a coach and a teacher at Plymouth high school, is convinced that some kids are being hurt by their involvement with drugs.

"If marijuana or alcohol is preventing these kids from getting their education, then it's a serious problem," he said.

He said the thing he notices most about kids who seem to be using marijuana is a personality change.

"There is sort of an apathy that goes along with it. You get the feeling the kid really doesn't care any more. The kids themselves don't really realize what has happened."

Wild said some students seem to be able to smoke it without suffering these effects, but he said, "Then I see other kids who have smoked marijuana and I see something bad has happened. I can't prove that it's marijuana or alcohol, but something bad has happened and I think drugs are a part of it."

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What apparently is needed now, he said, is more involvement on the part of parents. He would like to find more parents who sit down and talk with their children about drugs.

"I think we're only educating part of the population," he said. "We seem not to have any control over the community. I've got to convey to the parents that they have to watch their kids. Parents really don't realize what's going on."

Wild said the only parents who seem to show much concern about students using drugs are the ones who find out their kids are rather seriously involved.

He has never had a call from a parent whose child will soon be starting in the middle school asking advice about what to tell their children about drugs.

He has had lots of calls from parents asking advice after they find out their children have been smoking pot for a long time.

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Drug use seems to be an issue parents do not want to face.

"If they feel their kids are good kids, they'll avoid the issue," said Wild.

The school's efforts to get parents involved in the drug programs that have been presented have not been successful.

Last year, an ex-convict, Chuck Pleasant, spoke twice to student groups about drugs and his own unpleasant experiences. He also spoke once to a parents group, but the attendance was poor.

It is the same situation schools have usually found with parent-teacher meetings. The parents don't show up unless their kids are in some kind of program on stage.

"Unless we have a captive audience," said Wild, "we won't get an audience."

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What the community needs, he thinks, is for more parents to sit down and talk openly with their kids about drugs and to impress the children with strong values and point out that if they were caught smoking marijuana it would be an embarrassment to the family.

Wild is a firm believer in family discussion, and he said he has seen good results in families where the parents' concern really showed up too late, but by taking the problem seriously and discussing it, parents were able to help their children.

With drugs and alcohol apparently rather easy for students to obtain, one of the traditional ways of dealing with these problems is finding something wholesome for kids to do, so they won't have the time or the desire to get high.

"We used to say 'go out for sports'," said Wild, "but now we've got kids who can't wait until the game is over so they can go out and have a beer."

What the community needs, according to Wild, is to have parents convince their kids that there are good reasons for them not to smoke marijuana.

"I know I will never smoke marijuana," he said. "I've been scared by the evidence. And I know that if I were caught I would lose my job, and I don't want to lose my job. I think there are reasons for kids not to smoke, too, if they would realize it."

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