

“Every 15 Minutes”

Today your student witnessed a DUI presentation coordinated by American Medical Response Ambulance Company and the California Highway Patrol. This handout will answer some questions and explain what occurred at Valley Christian High School today and what will be occurring tomorrow.

During the graduation season, some high school students engage in “high risk” behavior that all too often includes alcohol use resulting in drinking and driving. *“Every 15 Minutes”* is a two-day program focusing on high school students and challenges them to think about drinking, personal safety, and the responsibility of making mature decisions when other lives are involved.

The name of the program was derived from the fact that every fifteen minutes someone in the United States dies in an alcohol-related traffic collision. In the early 1990’s when this program was conceived, this was true. However, with the implementation of new laws and programs such as this, the death rate is now every thirty minutes. This program does not preach “Don’t Drink and Drive”, but emphasizes smart decision making. The decisions students make not only affect them, but a vast number of individuals, some which are unknown to the decision-maker.

This program brings a broad coalition of interested agencies with the goal of reducing the incidents of alcohol-related traffic among today’s youths. The partnering of the California Highway Patrol, San Jose Fire, American Medical Response, San Jose Police Department, Valley Medical Center, San Jose Communications (Dispatch Center), Darling and Fischer Mortuaries, Santa Clara County Medical Examiner, Valley Christian High School and businesses and service clubs that donate monies and services, validates the importance of working together to insure a healthy community. This program *ONLY* works with the communities support, help and cooperation.

SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAM

The first day of the program begins with a student who is removed from class by a “Grim Reaper”. Students are visited in their classroom by the Reaper, who walks silently into the classroom and finds his “victim”, instructing them to “come with me.” A uniformed police officer and a school counselor then enter the classroom and read the student’s obituary. The obituary includes a photograph of the “deceased” and is posted in the classroom for the remainder of the school year. Approximately 21 students are chosen from different social groups within the school. Their parents have all agreed to allow them to participate.

In the morning, a mock fatal DUI collision is staged on the school football field. The students are alerted to the fact that a collision has taken place by a pre-recorded 9-1-1 call played over the school public address system. The student body is seated in bleachers with a view of the mock crash. The mock collision includes students “made-up” to resemble a trapped driver and passenger, and student who is dead on arrival (DOA). The DUI driver will have none to minor injuries. The collision is staged authentically, including police, fire, and paramedic response teams. The trapped passengers are extricated from the vehicle by rescue personnel using the “Jaws of Life” and transported to the hospital via ambulance. That student’s parents are told

to go to the hospital by police officers for the death notification, which is given by emergency room personnel. The "drunk" driver is given a field sobriety test by police and then handcuffed and transported to the police department for a simulated booking. The DOA is pronounced at the scene, placed in a body bag, and transported to the morgue by the Coroner.

At the end of the school day, the 21 "living dead" students are led to waiting buses that take them to a retreat location. These students will watch presentations and have frank discussions with law enforcement officers and emergency medical services workers about alcohol and other serious topics, as well as hear stories from drunk driving victims.

The program concludes on the second day with a school assembly. The 21 students at the retreat are bussed back to the school and there is a mock funeral for the victims of drunk drivers. Guest speakers and testimonials from parents and students involved in the program will be shared. The entire student body will have an opportunity to learn from the 21 students who attended the retreat and from their parent's experiences during the program.

The impact of this program we hope will be long lasting. We must work together to promote changes in behavior and thinking where needed. This includes Parents and other adults who interact with youth. It is not okay to give alcohol to teenagers even though the Parent may think it is safe because they are in a home and the Parent can "watch" them. Providing alcohol does not make a Parent "cool" – this makes the person an easy target for law enforcement - which is diligently arresting adults for this type of illegal behavior. Note the multiple articles in the paper in the past few months of arrest of adults who provided alcohol to teenagers who later crashed their cars.

Thank you for helping us in our effort to protect your kids and our community. We hope that you and your children learn some important information over the next few days and that you can both open up a dialogue about the reality of what can happen when alcohol is consumed and when poor decision making occurs. We hope, as parents, you communicate to them that if they are ever stuck somewhere in a situation where someone has had too much to drink, that it is okay for them to call you, at any hour of the day or night for a ride home. Many young people do not realize they are not invincible; we have an opportunity to let them see the consequences of their choices and actions. This is how we affect change.

Sincerely,

Laurie Tamura
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