

Juvenile Assessment Center  
of Lee County  
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December 2006

# The JAC Perspective

*Happy Holidays from the JAC Staff*



*The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County ... assisting youth and their families to seek the treatment and programs they need to lead productive, crime free lives.*

## CALENDAR

### **Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board Executive Committee**

December 6  
1:30 p.m.  
Southwest Florida Workforce  
Development Board

### **Lee County Juvenile Justice Council**

December 7  
1:30 p.m.  
Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex (formerly known as  
Regional Service Center)  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

### **Juvenile Sanctions Team**

December 14  
1:30 p.m.  
Lee JAC

### **Lee County Legislative Delegation**

December 18  
1:30 p.m.  
Edison College, Room S-106



*The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.*

## Happy Holidays - Or Not

The holiday season can be a time full of joy, celebration, and family gatherings. Yet, for many families, the demands of the season can strain holiday harmony. When the holiday season becomes a time of increased emotional turmoil, anger toward other family members can result. This may escalate into domestic violence in some families. The JAC sees more youth arrested for domestic violence during the holiday season than at other times of the year. Why do youth engage in domestic violence? There are a variety of underlying problems contributing to a youth behaving violently toward their parents or siblings. Teenagers can be living with undisclosed behaviors on the part of their parents that would define the youth as a victim first, such as, abuse, domestic violence be-

tween their parents, and habitual physical confrontation or threats. When a youth has not sought help for these circumstances, it can culminate with the teen perpetrating violence on other family members. Experiences outside of the family can also contribute to youth responding violently toward family members including membership in a gang, being a victim of bullying at school, or substance abuse. During the teenage years more transitory conflict can erupt that is associated with the teen's rebelliousness and independence-seeking behavior regarding rules and parental expectations. If arguing escalates between the parent and teen, there is the potential for both to act out physically. Why is the incidence of domestic (cont. page 2)

## Talk to Kids About Shoplifting

It's December...one of the biggest shopping seasons of the year. As you are driving your kids to the mall this holiday season, how about talking to them about shoplifting? Parents (and adults who work with youth) often take the time to talk to youth about drugs, alcohol, and internet safety. In addition to all the other dangerous issues and life threatening issues parents and concerned adults need to discuss with youth, it may be hard to think about discussing shoplifting. After all you've taught your youth to know right from wrong. Yet shoplifting is one of the most prevalent crimes com-



mitted by youth. Most youth who are caught shoplifting will say that they knew it was wrong. Juvenile shoplifting (cont. page 3)

## Happy Holidays - Or Not *(cont. from page 1)*



violence higher during the holiday season? To gain more perspective on this, the JAC consulted Laura Streyffeler, a Licensed Mental Health Counselor at Abuse Counseling and Treatment (ACT). According to Streyffeler, people are under immense pressure during the holidays to “be happy.” Expectations are high, sometimes too high. We see images all around us this time of year of happy families having perfect family holidays. The reality is that there are families with financial problems. Parents may have to choose between buying presents for their kids or paying their bills. People who work with youth and families may not be sensitive to some of the real problems that families face. Streyffeler noted that she knows of children whose families can’t even afford to pay for a bag of potato chips or a “Secret Santa” gift they were asked to bring to school. She recalled that the children stayed home from school on the day of the class party rather than face the embarrassment. The reality is that there are families in conflict. If one is in a family that doesn’t have resources, doesn’t get along, is in a combined family, or is in a fractured family, the holiday season can feel especially isolating, disappointing, and stressful. Streyffeler explained that people who don’t feel happy tend to think, “I’m not supposed to feel this way!” This can add to the anxiety they may already be feeling. Streyffler noted that we often don’t acknowledge that there are people that are unhappy during the holidays, but we need to. People need to know that, “It’s ok to be unhappy.” It is normal for both parents and for kids to feel stressed during the holidays. Knowing and acknowledging this can go a long way in assisting people to manage stress during the holiday season. For families that are interested in seeking support, the ACT hotline is available 24 hours a day at (239) 939-3112. United Way 211 (dial 211) can assist families in accessing local services.

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup, but families can take steps to pre-empt holiday stress.

### **Acknowledge your feelings.**

You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season. It is ok to not be happy.

### **Be realistic.**

Forget about perfection. Holiday TV specials are filled with happy endings. In real life, people don't usually resolve problems within an hour or two. Expect and accept imperfections. Accept that things aren't always going to go as planned.

### **Set differences aside.**

Try to accept family members as they are, even if they don't live up to all your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. With stress and activity levels high, the holidays might not be conducive to making quality time for relationships. Be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are, they're feeling the effects of holiday stress, too.

**Communicate positive thoughts and feelings.** Even if there is family conflict, focus on the positives. A parent might tell a teen, for example, “I know we have been fighting a lot lately, but I want you to know that I still love you.”

### **Stick to a budget.**

Before you go shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend and stick to your budget. If you don't, you could feel anxious and tense for months afterward as you struggle to pay the bills. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.

### **Seek support.**

If you feel isolated or down, seek out family members and friends, or community, religious or social services.

## School Absences Can Add Up to Retention or Loss of Credit

A fifteen year old girl and her mother sit before a review board at the JAC. It is not a courtroom, but the mood is just as serious. The girl has been missing school and has been called before the Truancy Ungovernable Runaway Network (TURN) review committee to review her case. The review board reviews the dates that the girl was absent. The girl explains that she was ill on those dates and that she has been under a doctor's care for a serious medical condition. She explains that she has notes from her doctor. Had she or her mother notified the school of her absences or turned in the notes? No. Members of the TURN committee explain that, according to school policy, her absences have been counted as unexcused absences. She and her mother agree that she needs to turn in the doctor's notes to her school and her mother needs to contact the school for any future absences.

It is the parent's responsibility to learn about their child's school's policies and procedures regarding attendance because schools may vary on the specific requirements. Generally, parents should call their child's school each morning that their child is absent. Upon returning to school, the parent should send a note with the specific date(s) and reason for the absence(s). Excusable absences include those due to sickness, injury, death in the family, and court dates. Advance written notification is required when a student plans to be absent for religious reasons. A long term illness must be verified by a physician's note. It is important for both parents and students to be aware that students may be retained or denied credit for excessive absences, even if the absences are excused. Students in kindergarten through grade 8 may be retained if they have 19 or more



absences. Students in grades 9 through 12 can be denied credit if absent 10 or more days per semester or 10 or more days in a specific class. Missing school a day here and there can add up and can have serious consequences. Parents with questions about school attendance and the specific requirements for their child's school are encouraged to call the school and ask to talk to their school attendance office.

## Talk To Kids About Shoplifting *(cont. from page 1)*

is not about knowing right from wrong. Threats, scare tactics and educating about the possible consequences of stealing are generally ineffective in preventing shoplifting. Most youth caught shoplifting say they knew there would be consequences if they were caught, but they didn't think about that when they were tempted. Sometimes youth may shoplift if they are trying to act cool or daring around their friends. Some youth admit they did it for the thrill of it. When youth are tempted to shoplift, they often talk themselves into believing that *shoplifting doesn't hurt anybody*.

Youth who shoplift tend to minimize the impact. This error in thinking is one of the biggest factors contributing to youth shoplifting. Most youth caught shoplifting indicate that they have never been presented with the viewpoint that shoplifting causes any real harm. Youth make comments, such as, "I never realized it would cause any real harm," or "I just thought that stores can afford the losses or that the store had insurance," or "I'd never thought about how stealing from a big corporation hurts consumers in the long run." Most youth

also don't consider the harm to themselves or to their families. To avoid future hardships for your child, yourself and your family, it is important that you take the time to discuss shoplifting with your children. Let them know that shoplifting is stealing and stealing is a crime. Let them know that every time someone steals, someone gets injured. Talk to them about who gets injured and how they are injured when someone steals. Let them know you value honesty and integrity. They'll listen.