

Some ways to help teens make the right choices



PRISCILLA STEINMETZ

Guest columnist

Since opening our doors in June 2010, The Bridge Teen Center in Orland Park has served hundreds of students from all walks of life, many of whom attend Consolidated High School District 230 schools.

Because of the proactive nature of our mission, The Bridge would like to applaud District 230 and Supt. James Gay for taking a stance on the recent drug- and alcohol-related issues among teens in our community and recognizing that it takes an entire community to address these alarming issues. District 230's statement can be found at <https://district.d230.org/depts/ss/teensubstanceabuse/default.aspx>.

In support of parents of students at Andrew, Sandburg and Stag high schools and all over the Southland, I would like to make suggestions for parents and guardians who want to take a proactive stance against unhealthy behavior.

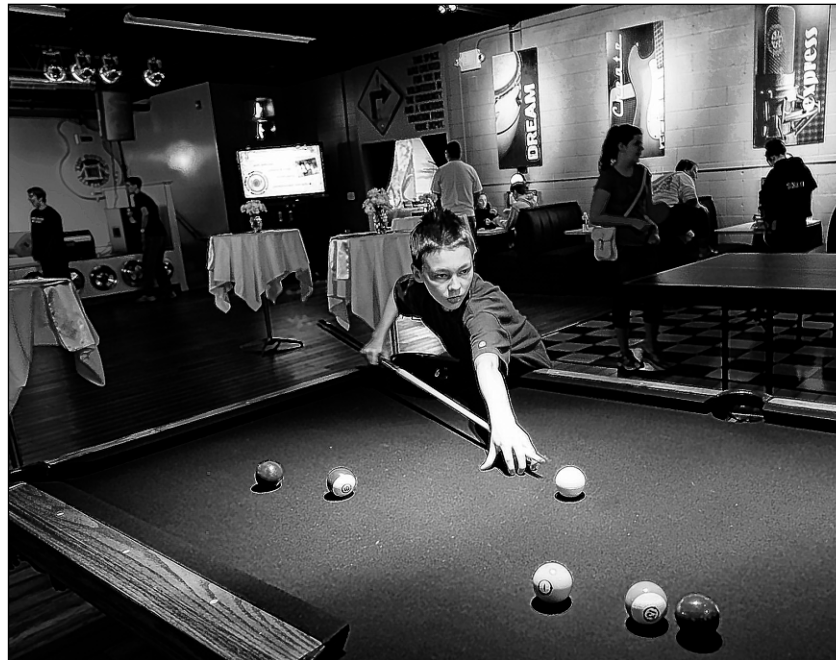
While The Bridge Teen Center is not a facility that treats drug and alcohol addictions, it has served about 1,000 different teens in just 18 months, and I have worked with teens and parents for more than 20 years.

The suggestions include:

■ **White picket fences.** Hurts, problems, addictions and stress know no economic or geographic boundaries. Issues once exclusive to inner cities now are commonplace in our "white picket fence" suburbs.

■ **Don't be ashamed of your situation** when things get messy. Be aware of the world around you, and do not be afraid to reach out for help or gain information about topics that might impact your teen. Although it may sometimes feel like it, you are not alone.

■ **Balance.** Set boundaries in what you share with your teen. Including your teen in family decisions or more



A teenager shoots pool at The Bridge Teen Center in Orland Park. | FILE PHOTO

"adult-like" conversations can be helpful in their transition into adulthood. Be careful not to allow major financial or marital conversations to be overheard by your teen.

Teens will withhold negative situations from parents if they think it will add to the stress level of their parents. Therefore, a teen may hold back or look for an alternative method of dealing with their troublesome situation. Creating an environment that projects a stable, "we are in this together" mentality is important to having a healthy family unit.

■ **Prune.** Instead of filling our lives and schedules with activities just to keep busy, evaluate how time is spent. If necessary, prune those items that do not serve a purpose or do not positively impact your teen's/family's values or goals.

Remembering that all of our lives have value, teach your teens how to live a life with purpose by becoming more intentional about how time is spent/invested.

■ **Mentors.** Encourage teens to make choices about their activities that help connect them with caring adults and promote a positive environment. A

coach, for example, should be more concerned about the safety and development of your teen than they are with winning the game.

Be sure to invest time in getting to know the adults with whom your teen is spending time. Other positive caring adults in your teen's life can help you be the best parent you can be.

■ **Mining for gold.** Make an effort to discover your teen's interests and passions. Every child has a "golden nugget" inside of them, and it is the adults' (parents, teachers, counselors, coaches, youth pastors, mentors) responsibility to "mine" for it.

We cannot expect our teens to navigate and discover this life by themselves. Make time to identify your teens' "golden nugget" by asking questions, exposing them to new experiences and being part of their life journey.

Priscilla Steinmetz is founder and executive director of The Bridge Teen Center in Orland Park, which provides free programs during after-school and unsupervised hours that help teenagers develop mentally and physically in a safe environment. She can be reached at priscilla@thebridgeteencenter.org

Crafts Moon Bounce
The Home Show®
Oak Lawn Pavilion
Saturday & Sunday
Feb 18 & Feb 19
 10 am to 5 pm
 9401 Oak Park Ave.
 Exit 355 at 95th Street
 www.ChicagoHomeShow.Net
 630-385-4000

Home Imprv Cool! Man Cave
FREE Admi\$tion
 & Free Parking

Travel Talk

by **TRAFALGAR**



FREE EVENT

An insider's guide to Europe

Join Trafalgar's President and an expert European Travel Director for amazing insights into how to get an insider's view of Europe and be the first to learn what's new and what's hot in travel this year.

- Take advantage of our exclusive attendee offers
- Enter the drawing for our Grand Prize giveaway!
- Enjoy refreshments and free parking

Date: February 9, 2012

Time: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

(Refreshments served 30 minutes prior)

Venue: Tinley Park Convention Center
 18451 Convention Center Dr.
 Tinley Park, IL 60477



CAROL'S
 Travel Service Inc.

RSVP today – seats are limited!

Call 708-532-5450 or register online at
www.carolstravel.com

