

# FCD UPDATE

FCD Educational Services, Inc.

A Nonprofit Organization

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Education

Fall 1999

## CYBERKIDS: OVERDOSING ON COMPUTERS?

An Interview with Dr. Maressa Hecht Orzack

*A mother has difficulty getting her daughter away from the computer to do chores and homework.*

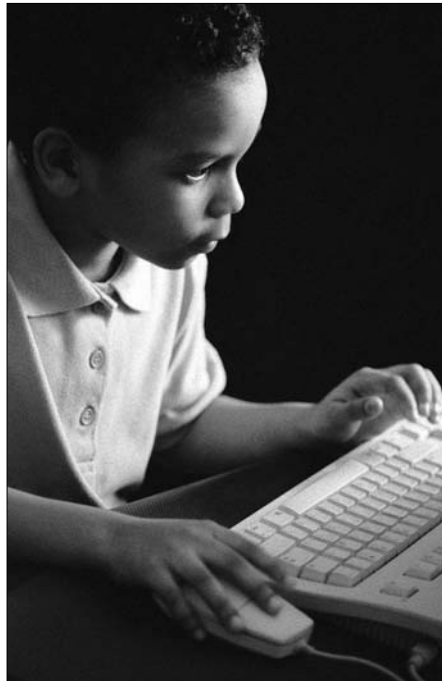
*A teen tells his parents he'll go to bed shortly and at dawn they find him still on the computer.*

*A college freshman spends every evening on the Internet communicating with her family and former high school classmates, and rarely participates in social activities on campus.*

These are all possible indications of a condition called Computer Addiction, Internet Addictive Disorder, or Cyber-addiction. It is similar to pathological gambling or compulsive shopping in that the person cannot control the behavior. Many counselors and deans of students report an increased association between inappropriate and excessive computer use and rule infractions, relationship problems, and academic difficulties. With more schools providing Internet access for every student, and more parents buying computers for their children, are we unwittingly creating a generation of children who need a daily cyberfix? Dr. Maressa Hecht Orzack, one of the world's leading experts on computer addiction, discusses this new and disturbing phenomenon with FCD.

### **What do you mean by computer/Internet addiction?**

Computer technology is everywhere — at our jobs, in our schools, and in our homes. It's the fastest growing industry in the world, and many of us have become increasingly dependent on computers for information, entertainment, and communication. But problems arise when com-



puters start to dominate rather than serve our lives. Computer use becomes abuse when it interferes with one's work, schooling, or personal relationships.

One man told me that his girlfriend in college gave him an ultimatum — either the computer had to go or she was going to go. So he let her go, and his computer addiction carried into his twenties.

### **How widespread is Internet addiction among adolescents?**

We just don't have the research and statistics yet to make generalizations, but it's a pretty high number. It's scary because I'm starting to see more and more adolescents. Many of the kids I see come from households where there are three or four computers available. Sometimes members of the same family are communicating via e-mail from within their own home.

There's an ad on TV touting a deal where you can buy up to five cellular phones — one for each member of the family. It can get to the point where no one is talking to each other except by remote control.

### **Teens often go through periods of passionate, almost obsessive interests. What makes you say it's an addiction?**

Some kids are just being kids and having fun, but when it's done obsessively, that's when we run into problems. Parents and educators should watch out for the warning signs. People with computer addiction have highly compulsive behavior and tend to neglect other things. Their grades may slip, they may even drop out of school. They might lose sleep, become alienated from their family and friends, and crave more and more computer time. And if they don't get it, they get very, very angry. These are the symptoms of an addictive

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### **Some of What's Inside...**

#### **It's 11:00 p.m. Do you know what Web site your child is on?**

School counselors are reporting an alarming increase in students whose computer use is out of control. Is Internet addiction a genuine problem or a media creation? Learn more in our interview with psychologist and computer addiction expert Dr. Maressa Hecht Orzack.

#### **That Was the Year that Was**

A special insert with FCD's 1998-1999 Annual Report.

#### **Cyberaddicted Kids**

Is a child you know obsessed with computers? Here's a questionnaire that may tell you if it's a passing phase or a serious problem.

#### **Emoticonal Intelligence**

Here's a quiz to see how emoticon-literate you are.

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## From the President

I was recently asked to be a guest on CNN's weekly online author chat. As one who always comes late to technological advances (my TV is pre-remote and I don't have cable), I had never set foot in a chat room. As the day approached, I was filled with anxiety. Would my computer crash? Would I embarrass myself with typos? Would I develop chatter's block? None of these scenarios came to pass. I should have known that as a writer, I was hard-wired for this form of communication: ideas flowing from the mind through the fingertips to the keyboard onto the screen and back to the mind. I *loved* the experience. And in that one exposure, I felt the addictive pull of the Internet.



Alex J. Packer

Since then, I have upgraded my Internet service to unlimited online access. I have surfed and chatted and been stunned to look at my watch and discover that it's three hours later. Of course, I only visit sites for recipe swapping, container gardening, and Monday morning quarterbacking. :-)

Chat rooms can get old pretty fast, and it looks like I will not turn into a computer junkie. But my experiences did give me a deeper understanding of the wonders, adventures, and dangers that lie in wait on the Internet for today's cyberkids.

The technological explosion transforming our society has outpaced our awareness of the effects of these changes on a child's social, emotional, intellectual, and even physical development. Many psychologists, educators and technology researchers believe that giving computers to children under seven may be harmful. In fact, they are already reporting a number of disturbing trends:

- perfectionistic preschoolers who don't like to finger-paint or crayon because their drawings don't look as good as the ones they make with their computer;
- grade schoolers who spend so much time at the computer they don't know how to play or socialize;
- teens who indiscriminately use the Internet to do their thinking for them.

In addition, children who overdose on computers can develop dry eyes from staring at the screen, carpal tunnel syndrome, migraines, back aches, and poor eating, sleeping, and personal hygiene habits.

In the race to see how fast we can push kids into computer literacy, we need to ask ourselves: What is the effect of early computer use on imaginative play, peer relationships, and the development of social skills? Do snazzy computer images inhibit a child's own creative efforts? Are we teaching kids the difference between data and knowledge? Authoritative sources and self-appointed online "experts"? How much "educational" software is truly innovative and valuable, and how much simply translates the worst of classroom instruction to the screen?

There exists in our culture an almost hysterical adulation of computers and the Internet. And children do need to master these tools. But not at the expense of mud pies and sand castles, snowballs and puddle splashing, stargazing and holding hands. If we don't control computers, they will end up controlling us. And that seems like a Net loss to me.

Alex J. Packer, Ph.D.

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behavior that needs to be addressed. (See the Online Obsession Questionnaire, page 6)

### **How similar or different is computer/Internet addiction to other addictions?**

Just as gamblers or alcoholics on a binge are “chasing the win,” people with computer addiction often have a sense of well-being or even euphoria while at the computer, and can feel empty or depressed when they’re not online. They can actually build a tolerance to whatever they are doing, and need to play more challenging games or be on longer.

### **Are there young people who are at higher risk for Internet addiction? If so, are these kids also at high risk for other addictions?**

In general, these adolescents are extremely bright, and tend to be bored, highly depressed, lonely, and shy. The real world just doesn’t appeal to them. One 16-year-old who came to me said that he was always on the wrong end of being included, he just never felt like he fit in. These kids tend to know the technology better than anyone else. They’ll hack into inappropriate sites and try to find out what’s going on, even try to change what they find. They like to defy authority and show off their expertise.

I saw one young man whose parents had discovered that he had visited a pornographic Web site. They put a block on his computer. Of course, the block was an immediate challenge to him. So he and a friend went into his parent’s computer, dismantled the system, and broke the block. But then he went even further and got their passwords. When his parents came home to use their own computers, they couldn’t because the boy had reconfigured their passwords.

Many of these young people are involved in power games where mastery moves you from one level to the next. Some are involved in role-playing games, many of which are very violent. They are thrill seekers and risk takers. But they are

not necessarily involved in other risky behaviors like drug taking. Some do, some don’t. When I asked one young man about this he replied, “What do you need drugs for?” meaning that he was getting all the high he needed in cyberspace.

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### **Are there patterns to adolescent addiction?**

Both kids and adults enjoy the anonymity allowed them in the chat rooms. From the privacy of your own room, you can pretend to be anybody, you can say anything, and you’re not held responsible for it in any way. Lots of teenagers report that they like to switch genders online — it’s more fun that way. Many kids try pornography sites; some of them gamble online. There was a case recently of teenagers ordering alcohol online and having it delivered to their home. Their ages were never checked.

One thing I’ve noticed that is unique to the adolescent culture is the continuation of conversations and cliques after school. Some of these kids run home from school

and get on chat lines that have buddy lists, where you only allow certain people in, and exclude others. They actually hang out online talking to the same kids they spent the day with. Sometimes they are even having simultaneous phone conversations and watching TV. It’s amazing really. These are the kids who, in previous generations, used to hang out at the mall together or go to the soda shop. Now, instead of being together, they are connecting with their friends in the solitude of their homes.

### **Have you noticed any differences in how teenage males and females use the Internet?**

There are big differences. In general, males tend to surf the Web for sex sites, and females prefer chat sites. Boys tend toward more violent games, girls toward the more intellectually challenging ones.

### **Any thoughts on the recent research showing that the more people use the Internet, the more depressed they become?**

There is a lot of research on that now, but it’s too early to tell which comes first, the depression or the Internet use. In general, I would say that this is simply a new tool that people are using to change their moods. It is much more insidious, perhaps, than other addictions, because you can do all this from your own room. Compulsive sex, for instance, has been around forever, but now you can actually meet someone online and essentially consummate it without leaving your room.

### **Are there support groups for teens with Internet addiction? Are some of them online? How does THAT work? It seems the same as having an AA meeting in a bar.**

There are online support groups for all sorts of addictions, illnesses, and common interests. When JFK Jr. died, for example, I heard that thousands of people went online and connected with each other,

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# Emoticonal Intelligence

If you're a Web surfer or a frequenter of chat rooms, you're probably familiar with *emoticons*, those little sideways faces you create with letters and punctuation to indicate your expression or mood. Here are examples of some very common emoticons (turn the page 90 degrees clockwise to see the faces):

- : - ) I'm smiling, laughing, just kidding
- : - ( I'm frowning, unhappy, bummed out
- : - O "WHAT?!?!?" I'm shocked! Yelling!
- { : ( ) I have a toupee and moustache.

But here are some you may not know. So let's see just how high your *emoticonal intelligence* is.

## What do these emoticons mean?

Answers below right

1. { : -----
  - a) my nose is running
  - b) I told a fib
  - c) I was a lollipop in a previous life.
2. I
   
 { : -
   
 I
  - a) I love to pump iron
  - b) I was born with a pole through my head
  - c) I have very large ears.
3. { : >>>>>
  - a) I'm gonna hurl lunch
  - b) each of my five chins has a goatee
  - c) I just swallowed a V-chip.

Emoticon quiz and cartoons from *How Rude: The Teenagers' Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behavior, and Not Grossing People Out* by Alex J. Packer, Ph.D. (Free Spirit Publishing, 1997). Illustrations by Jeff Tolbert.

## You know you're a compuholic when...



Your friends take your keys away.



You hide laptops all over the house and deny any knowledge of them.



You wake up with a strange computer and don't know how you got it.

- <<<<<:}
- Has anyone seen my Siamese twin? He looks like this:
3. None of the answers is correct. The emoticon means born with a pole through my very large ears.
  2. None of the answers is correct. The emoticon means I was
  1. c.
- Answers:**

# Parents, Teachers, Students

One of the goals of this newsletter is to provide a forum where parents, educators, and students can share ideas and experiences. We are busy working on future issues of the FCDUPDATE and would like to include your comments and suggestions. Although the following questions are aimed at different segments of our readership, please feel free to respond to ANY question in which you are interested or knowledgeable.

## Questions for students...

- Experts in the prevention field say that more and more young people are addicted to gambling. Do you think this is true? What can you tell us about your own or others' experiences with gambling? Does gambling occur at your school? At people's houses? Online? What forms does the gambling take? Do you have any friends or classmates who are, or were, addicted? What happened to them? Please tell us what you know about this issue.
- Is Ritalin abuse a problem at your school? If yes, what are some examples of this? How do students without prescriptions get the drug and how do they take it? Why do they take it? How does it make them feel? If you wanted to buy some Ritalin, could you? What would you have to pay? If you are currently taking Ritalin under a doctor's supervision, have any of your friends or classmates asked you to give or sell them any of your pills? What did you do?

## Questions for students, educators, and parents...

- When people speak of community "norms," they are referring to the expectations, values, and beliefs held in common by the majority of that community's members. For example, in one school community, students may feel that the "norm" is to drink alcohol and/or take other drugs: "It's cool, everybody does it." In another school, the norm may be just the opposite. Norms can influence behavior, attitude, and social status within the community.

What would you say the "norms" are in your school (or your child's school) towards student use of alcohol and other drugs? Who sets those norms? How are they communicated? What role do teachers, administrators and school policies play in setting norms? What role do students and/or student leaders play? Are you comfortable with the norms in your (or your child's) school community? Why or why not? What would have to be done, and by whom, to change those norms to your satisfaction?

- Many schools have adopted "zero tolerance" policies towards alcohol and other drug use. This means that a student's very first offense will lead to a disciplinary response that may include expulsion. What do you think of zero tolerance policies? Are they effective in reducing drug use? What is the policy in your own (or your child's) school? How would you like to see it change?
- The first priority of any prevention program should be to support those students who are already making healthy choices with regard to alcohol and other drugs. What does your (your child's) school do to support students who choose not to use? Are these students visible in the school community? How are they viewed? Do they represent the norm or a minority? Does the school have support and activity groups for students who choose not to use? What do the groups do? How are they perceived? What could schools do to provide more support for students who do not use alcohol or other drugs?
- What questions do you have for FCD?
- What topics would you like to see us cover in future issues?

The submission of a comment or question constitutes your permission for FCD to edit, publish, and/or quote from it in future newsletters and/or other FCD publications. We will NOT identify contributors by name or school unless you specifically state that we may do so. We hope you will include your name, (school and age if a student), and a way for us to contact you in the event that we would like to talk with you further, alert you to your piece being included in a future newsletter, and/or see if you'd be interested in expanding your contribution into a credited article. If you choose not to include your name, PLEASE IDENTIFY YOURSELF as, for example, "public school student, age 16," "parent of two teenagers," "dean of students, independent middle boarding school," etc.

### Please submit your comments and questions via...

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26 Cross Street  
Needham, MA 02494

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looking for answers, comfort, or people with whom to share their disbelief and grief. Support is very important, and the Internet can be so helpful in allowing people to connect. But treating cyberaddicts online just doesn't work.

**With many chemical and behavioral addictions, total abstinence is the only "cure." Is this the case with Internet addiction, or can adolescents learn to use the Internet moderately and appropriately after they have been addicted?**

You can't ask anybody in this day and age to abstain. It's unrealistic. These kids are growing up in the computer age. They are expected to use computers, and their success in school and their future livelihoods depends on it. What they must do is learn to control it and abstain from addictive use. It's much like an eating disorder in that way. People with eating disorders must continue to eat, but learn how not to abuse food.

Treatment is pretty new and we try to be innovative. Most of my patients are on medication, so we use a team approach involving family therapy, medication, and, whenever possible, group support — although we've found it very challenging to get a bunch of cyberaddicts to actually come out and sit together in a room.

**What guidelines should parents follow to prevent the problem?**

I would suggest that parents keep the computer in a centralized place in the house—the den, family room or kitchen. They should employ blocks to keep their children from accessing inappropriate sites. Obviously, they should tell their kids to never give out their name, phone number or address; to never go to meet someone they met online unless they have a parent with them. There are some tragic stories of children being lured to malls or other places by pedophiles. Some people say that children should not even be on the computer before the age of five. So parents definitely have to set limits and monitor their child's use.

**How should parents respond if they suspect a problem?**

Parents often take the modem away from their child. But it is far more useful for the family to work together to set limits and guidelines. Instead of taking a punitive approach (which, unfortunately, I see a lot of), let your child know that you want to help. This must be done in an empathic way. Don't judge or accuse because then the child will become defensive. Let the child know that you are noticing some problems: poor appetite, fighting with siblings (more than normal!), staying up too late. Express your concern. Intervene if he or she is exhausted, skipping meals, or missing school. Set time limits on how long the child can stay online. Institute more blocks on games or pornography. Brainstorm alternatives to going online. It really needs to be a whole family approach.

It's also a good idea to look for outside help, someone who is knowledgeable in the field. The child may need treatment with a therapist. Many university counseling services might provide help, because colleges are seeing more and more of this problem. And talk to your child's school counselors.

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*For over 15 years, Dr. Maressa Hecht Orzack, a licensed clinical psychologist, has treated addictive behaviors at McLean Hospital, where she is Founder and Coordinator of Computer Addiction Services. She is a faculty member of the Harvard Medical School and the Cognitive Therapy Program, and is in private practice in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. Dr. Orzack has been featured in numerous publications including Newsweek, PC World, Spin, US News and World Report, Science, Computing for Kids, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today.*

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**ONLINE OBSESSION QUESTIONNAIRE**

Here, according to Dr. Maressa Hecht Orzack of the Harvard Medical School, are some signs of computer obsession in children:

- 1 Is the child preoccupied with spending money for new software?
- 2 Is the child missing school or falling asleep in class?
- 3 Have the child's grades dropped?
- 4 Is the child getting on the computer earlier and earlier each day?
- 5 Are there signs of dry eyes, caused by not blinking when looking at monitors?
- 6 Has the child been neglecting personal hygiene?
- 7 Does the child have strong headaches?
- 8 Is there a lack of interest in eating?
- 9 Is the child lying to the family about time spent online?
- 10 Must the child have a game or laptop along when she should be interacting with people?
- 11 Is the child spending more and more time around computer activities?
- 12 Has the child risked losing real-life relationships?
- 13 Is the child able to be away from the computer without thinking about it all the time?

Dr. Orzack says the presence of four or five factors may indicate a need for help. Dr. Orzack believes that one of the most effective methods for dealing with computer addiction is cognitive behavior therapy, which teaches the client to identify and solve the problem, and to learn coping skills to prevent relapse. Often the treatment is helped by medication. In addition, Dr. Orzack recommends support groups for family members and other affected persons. She does not treat online, stating, "I'm licensed in Massachusetts, not in cyberspace".

*Adapted with permission from Dr. Maressa Hecht Orzack  
<http://www.computeraddiction.com>*

# Did you know?

## Online Alcohol

According to a report issued by the Center for Media Education, Web sites promoting alcoholic beverages are proliferating. After scrutinizing 77 different alcohol beverage company sites, center researchers found that 62 percent featured games, cartoon figures, and “youth oriented” language that would appeal to young people. Just as the cigarette industry

denied that Joe Camel was aimed at children, you can be sure the alcoholic beverage industry would deny they’re trying to attract teenagers who are too young to drink legally. Yeah, right.

## Sad in Cyberspace

When a number of high tech giants – Intel, Hewlett Packard, AT&T, and Apple Computer among them – financed a \$1.5 million study to explore the social and psychological effects of Internet use at home, they expected to find that such use would have a positive impact on people’s lives. Instead, they found that “greater use of the Internet was associated with declines in participants’ communication with family members in the household, declines in the size of their social circle, and increases in their depression and loneliness.”

This shocked the research team, according to Dr. Robert Kraut, a social psychology professor at Carnegie Mellon’s Human Computer Interaction Institute. Their hypothesis, based on the fact that people go on the Internet to connect, chat, and find like-minded individuals, was that access to so much information and interaction would improve people’s lives.

While the design of the study raises the possibility that factors other than Internet use may have contributed to the findings, the statistical significance of the results has led social scientists and computer technology researchers to re-examine some of their basic assumptions about the value of online interaction. No matter how socially active we may be on the Internet, we are still alone in a room with a computer. And that’s no substitute for a cup of coffee with a friend.

## SITE-SEEING

Now that we’ve got you worried about how much time you’re spending at your computer, here are some alcohol- and other drug-related Web sites you might want to check out.

### FCD Educational Services

<http://www.fcd.org>

Our newly updated site contains general information about FCD’s mission and programs, back issues of our newsletters, a list of client schools, and letters from our president and founder.

### Freevibe

<http://www.freevibe.com>

This colorful, informative, teen-friendly site is filled with reliable facts about drug use and has a teen chat room where young people talk about drug-related issues.

### Hazelden

<http://www.hazelden.org>

Hazelden, renowned as a treatment center for drug addictions, is the world’s leading publisher of materials on chemical dependency and other addictions, recovery, and “abundant living.”

### Join Together Online

<http://www.jointogether.org>

Join Together Online is a resource center and meeting place for communities working to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use.

### Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

<http://www.madd.org>

Mothers Against Drunk Driving is a non-profit organization that aims to stop drunk driving and to support the victims of this violent crime.

### National Association for Children of Alcoholics

<http://www.health.org/nacoa>

This site offers a broad range of information, research data, and articles for people affected by addiction in the family, with a unique “Just for Kids” section.

### National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids

<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org>

Along with updated information on all things tobacco, this site contains a direct link to Congress, allowing you to conveniently voice your opinions.

### National Inhalant Prevention Coalition

<http://www.inhalants.org>

This site effectively describes the damage inhalants can cause to the body and brain. Useful “Tips for Teachers” section as well as “Tips for Retailers.”

### National Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://www.nida.nih.gov>

This site provides reliable, factual data and is a valuable resource for parents and educators looking for effective ways to communicate with young people about alcohol and other drug use.

### Partnership for a Drug-Free America

<http://www.drugfreeamerica.org>

A one-stop shopping resource for parents. From prevention to intervention, this site has it all. Includes an extensive reading list, and addresses for free publications.

### Recovery Network

<http://www.recoverynetwork.com>

The Recovery Network is a new cable television network that provides viewers with prevention and recovery information, as well as online services and a national help line.

## **FCD Calendar of Conferences and Speaking Events**

### **November 11, 1999**

Independent Schools Association of  
the Central States (ISACS)  
Cleveland, Ohio

### **November 18-19, 1999**

1900/2000 Peer Leadership training  
St. Mary's Parish Center  
Mansfield, Massachusetts

### **November 19, 1999**

New York State Association of  
Independent Schools (NYSAIS)  
Winston Preparatory School  
New York, New York

### **November 19-21, 1999**

European Council of Independent  
Schools (ECIS)  
Nice, France

### **December 6, 1999**

Association of Independent Maryland  
Schools (AIMS)  
Baltimore, Maryland

### **January 12, 2000**

Complimentary FCD Workshop\*  
The Barrie School  
Silver Springs, Maryland

### **February 10, 2000**

New York State Association of  
Independent Schools (NYSAIS)  
Grace Church School  
New York, New York

### **February 28 - March 2, 2000**

Association for the Advancement of  
International Education (AAIE)  
San Francisco, California

### **March 1-4, 2000**

National Association of  
Independent Schools (NAIS)  
Baltimore, Maryland

### **March 16-18, 2000**

Independent Schools Association  
of the Southwest (ISAS)  
New Orleans, Louisiana

### **March 17-18, 2000**

Central and Eastern European Schools  
(CEESA)  
Prague, Czech Republic

### **June 22-26**

National Peer Helpers Association  
(NPHA)  
Boston, Massachusetts

\* Please contact FCD if you are  
interested in attending our  
complimentary workshops.

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FCD welcomes your comments, questions, and ideas. To  
learn more about anything in the newsletter, to send letters  
to the editor, or to submit a manuscript or proposal for an  
article, please contact:

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## **Mission Statement**

Founded in 1976, FCD (Freedom from  
Chemical Dependency) Educational  
Services, Inc., is a nonprofit organization  
that provides alcohol, tobacco, and other  
drug education and prevention programs  
for schools throughout the United States  
and abroad. Using highly trained educa-  
tors who teach from the recovering  
perspective, our mission is to:

- Provide up-to-date information on the  
physiological and psychological effects  
of alcohol and other drugs;
- Promote awareness of chemical depen-  
dency as a primary, progressive, and  
often fatal disease;
- Empower young people to make  
healthy, responsible choices regarding  
alcohol and other drug use;
- Encourage and support the non-use  
of alcohol and other drugs during the  
growing years.

## **Services**

With over twenty years of experience, FCD  
offers a wide range of services including:

- Comprehensive drug education  
programs for students from kinder-  
garten through college
- intervention training
- prevention planning and policy consul-  
tation to schools, colleges, businesses,  
and health care professionals
- assemblies and workshops for adminis-  
trators, teachers, parents, students,  
coaches, proctors, residential advisors,  
trustees, school boards, health care  
staff, and community organizations.