

# Chat room from page B1

As drug use rose to the highest levels our country has ever seen in the mid- to late 1970s, there were increasing problems with discipline. Liability concerns loomed larger and school districts dropped senior trips like hot potatoes. Even today, school districts wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole.

At the same time, spring break trips, which had been a college experience, became popular for younger and younger students until they developed as a tradition for high school seniors. As I talk to parents, they were allowing their kids to go in part because they had such fond memories of their own senior trips and wanted their seniors to have a similar experience. What they didn't realize, however, is that spring break trips were developing into very risky adventures.

## Heavy drinking, easy sex

A study and videotape made in 1991 by the Rutgers University Department of Health Education depicts a current atmosphere loaded with heavy drinking, easy sex, and other risky behaviors that are encouraged by drunken crowds of seniors. Parents who have seen this video are shocked and unaware that it was that bad.

Annually, Farmington school staff mention troublesome incidents confided by our own seniors who have been on spring break trips. They have includ-

Legal drinking age in Mexico is 16, so there is no hassle buying alcohol there. Even Florida is lax on carrying in many areas. We hear the worst stories coming out of Cancun, an area that markets heavily to spring-break revelers. Even the "chaperones" are quick to tell you they are not there to baby-sit seniors. They are there to handle emergencies and see that kids get on the boat but will not do bed checks or keep a student from drinking all day.

As you will be discussing this issue with your senior, these are the most typical arguments you will hear.

**Last chance - I'm so sad issue:** This is the last time that my friends and I can be together before we all separate for college! Why can't we go on a trip to someplace warm and hang out? It would mean a lot.

Spring break is not the last chance; there are all the senior activities and an entire summer to enjoy. I'm not sure why seniors think that they deserve a great trip for graduating from high school; after all, some parents have not even been on a cruise before.

**Everyone's going issue:** Mom, everyone else in my group is being allowed to go. If you say no, I'll be the only one not to go.

In a 1994 spring break issue of a local high school student paper, I counted the list of students who went somewhere for spring break. I knew most of the kids, and in fact knew many were actu-

ally in chaperoned situations. I counted only 25 to 30 percent of seniors who were unsupervised going to Cancun or on cruises. While that count might vary slightly from school to school, 30 percent is not everybody.

**Money issue:** "Don't worry, you won't have to pay for a thing. I'll work and pay for everything with my own money."

If you think cost will be a deterrent, think again. Some families require that kids save half of everything they earn for college expenses. Or a car if they're not going to college. Try not to link the decision to money.

**Lame trip issue:** "I am not going on a lame trip with my parents! No way!"

Successful persuasion often depends on the way the issue is presented. Remember when they were 3, you gave them choices, but they were all choices which were acceptable. It is the same idea here. Involve them with planning. Work out several possibilities which fulfill your criteria. Then the student decides which choice he and his friend want to do.

**Trust issue:** "Look dad, I am going to be on my own at college in for months anyway. If you can't trust me now, when can you trust me?"

This is the toughest one to explain. You trust your kid to handle the situations that he or she has encountered in high school, but you don't know about this situation. A Cancun trip would probably be the highest risk situation in his life, and there is nothing he or she has done to earn your trust yet. Why are we paying big bucks to put them into a high risk situation?

## Choosing other options

More and more parents are concerned enough to come up with other options. Here are some actual ideas for spring break used by Farmington parents.

Vacation with family but bring one or

more friends of the senior along. Destinations were Colorado for skiing, Florida at a family condo, California, even certain cruises.

Extended family vacation with several families going to one destination supervising a group of seniors. Several families did this to Mexico and had a great experience.

Special interest camps for the senior and a friend. One family took their "technical" kid and a friend to a Defensive Driving School in Tucson, Ariz.

A supervised road trip was comfortable for one family that had done extensive cross country driving trips with their senior. A group of four boys planned a road trip to Florida with stops planned at relative's homes along the way. The boys drove to Tennessee the first night to stay with relatives and drove to Orlando the second day to stay with relatives for five days. They were on their own during the day and stayed with family at night.

Stay home and save money. Some would rather save money for something else. Some kids have to stay home and practice with their sports team.

The point is that each family can plan an alternative that is comfortable for the parent and still provides something special for the end of high school.

Linda Enberg, RN and former president of Farmington Families in Action, is still an active volunteer with FFIA.

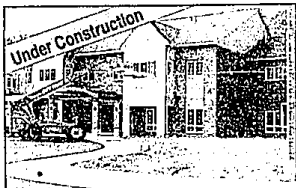
## Poetry contest set

The National Library of Poetry has announced that \$48,000 in prizes will be awarded this year in the North American Open Poetry contest.

Poets from the Farmington area, particularly beginners, are welcome to try to win their share of 250 prizes. The deadline is Dec. 31 and the contest is open to everyone and is free.

"Any poet, whether previously published or not, can be a winner," said Howard Ely, contest director. "Poets from Farmington have successfully competed in the past."

To enter, send one original poem, any subject or style, to the National Library of Poetry, Suite 1996, 1 Poetry Plaza, Owings Mills MD. 21117.



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