

Dear Jean Enerson

By Norman E. Kjono

An Open Letter To Jean Enerson, Seattle NBC King 5 News:

Ms. Enerson,

On Friday August 30, 2002 NBC King 5 TV 6:30 Evening News you gave the following HealthLink report, headlined on www.King5.com HealthLink as "Risky behavior of kids mirrors parents actions:"

"New research finds parents' habits may increase the chances a teen will engage in risky behaviors. Researchers studied the behavior of 19,000 high schoolers. They found kids of parents who smoked were more likely to pick up the habit and were 50 percent more likely to have sex by the age of 15. Teens with parents who drink heavily were also more likely to drink. Risky behavior by parents also increased the changes their teens would steal or damage property."

That's quite a mouthful of negative labeling and unfavorable stereotyping of children on a one minute sound bite.

My son is an overall 3.69 GPA (3.83 last semester) student at Lake Washington High School, a member of the Kang football team. He has spent the summer attending SAT classes to prepare for college applications, and has worked diligently during the week on homework assignments for that program. My son is not a disciplinary problem at school, and many teachers include favorable comments with his grades. My son does not smoke, nor does he drink alcohol. He has shown persistence and commitment over the past nine months working with me to restore a 1981 El Camino. Like so many of his peers at Lake Washington High, my son is a good kid who cares about his personal goals, his school, and his family.

I am deeply offended, and frankly angered, that you and King 5 TV choose to blithely label that young man as an "at

risk kid" for whom the chances are increased that he "would steal or damage property." Your cavalier negative labeling of my son and his fellow students whose parents smoke is unacceptable and out of hand. You should be embarrassed.

Please, no strident denials about what "the studies say," you did not even provide the study sources so responsible parents could check the validity of your information. Beyond the validity of study data, you and King 5 should be more sensitive the fact that your report creates an unfavorable impression of my son and many of his classmates based on whether or not *their parents* choose to lawfully consume a legal product, of which you apparently disapprove.

So what are kids supposed to do, take Jean Enerson's rap for her personal disapproval of *their parents'* lawful behavior? Are kids now responsible for their parents, unwitting dupes in the political game of dump on "Target Group" consumers for taxes, profit and political clout? Precisely what are those children who have now been labeled as those more likely to steal or damage property supposed to do? How do they remove the negative stigma you have placed on them?

Stop the "toilet tongue." Jean Enerson and King 5 owe a public apology to every child of a parent who smokes. That apology is due because you presume to negatively label and unfavorably stereotype young people for something that they have no control over, and which they may not even do.

Having supported for years allegedly anti-tobacco programs focused on kids as school that presided over a 40 percent-plus *increase* in youth smoking during the 1990s (see below graphic produced from University of Michigan's "Monitoring the Future Study"), King 5 now apparently seizes the opportunity to spew hurtful missives at the larger youth and adult smoking populations that such programs helped create.

Responsible and caring parents—including those of us who choose to *lawfully* consume *legal* tobacco products—await your apology to our children.

Sincerely Disgusted,

Norman E. Kjono

