

How to prevent substance abuse

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Glowing orange pumpkin, and splashes of pink serve to remind us that October kicks off many days of commemoration; Down Syndrome Awareness, National Dyslexia Awareness, Domestic Violence Awareness, Breast Cancer Awareness, Bullying Prevention and Clergy Appreciation Month just to mention a few. In 2011 President Obama added to the long list of awareness, National Substance Abuse Awareness Month.

How does any one subject become the topic of national awareness? It starts with community awareness. National Substance Abuse Awareness brings attention to the prevalence of substance abuse but it must be addressed on the community level to make an impact.

I invite parents to go to a community park or the football stadium on Friday night for the big game. Count out ten youth at the park or in the football stadium. Make certain that you include in your count at least one of your own children. NOW ask yourself which of these ten youth has already tried marijuana or alcohol? Studies conducted by the National Center for Children in Poverty tell us that ten percent of children in 2009 ages 12-17 were current illicit drug users. Rates of current alcohol use were 3.5 percent among 12-13 year olds, 13 percent of persons aged 14-15 and 26 percent for 16-17 year olds.

An estimated six percent of 16-17 year olds and nearly 17 percent of 18-20 year olds reported driving under the influence of alcohol in the past year. IS your student the driver or is he a passenger?

Rates of current cigarette smokers also climbed steadily by age, with one percent of youth age 12 and 13, seven percent 14 and 15 year olds, and 17 percent of those 16-17 years of age reporting current usage.

Prevention and early intervention for substance abuse can alter the tragic outcomes often associated with substance abuse. Youth who abuse substances have a diminished capacity for achievement of goals and are more likely to drop out of school. They form poor interpersonal relations and make poor choices that have far reaching consequences beyond what the youth can imagine. It negatively impacts their memory and ability to learn new concepts and skills. They are more likely to engage in unprotected sex, increasing their risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Take another look at the ten students you selected earlier and fast forward a few years. According to the National Council on Alcohol and Drug Addiction: each year, more than 600,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who have been drinking. Ninety-five percent of all violent crimes on college campuses involves the use of alcohol by the assailant, victim, or both. Ninety percent of acquaintance rape and sexual assault on college campuses involves the use of alcohol by the assailant, victim, or both. Every day, 36 people die, and approximately 700 are injured in motor vehicle crashes that involve an alcohol-impaired driver.

Drinking and drugged driving is the number one cause of death, injury and disability of young people under the age of 21.

Discuss with your tweens and teens substance use whenever they are exposed to it. Draw upon the stories in the media and TV shows to start a conversation. Don't be afraid to ask your youth if they have experimented with substances or know someone who has. Be honest with them of the negative consequences of substance abuse. Give a clear and concise message about substance abuse. Be a good listener. Monitor your child's whereabouts, know their friends and the parents of their friends. Be an active participant in your child's life, talk often and supervise their activities. Know where to get help for your child.

Locally, the Jackson County Community Health Action Team has a substance awareness committee working to prevent this issue. Their next meeting will be on Oct. 27; at the Jackson County Health Department at 10 a.m. These meetings are open to the general public, and we encourage local residents to participate. Together we can work to prevent substance abuse! For more information on how to get involved with the committee contact Kim Bryant, committee chair, at (580) 471-7789. Also, check out the committee's Facebook page, Jackson County Substance Awareness Committee.

Contact Kimberly A. Bryant, Executive Director, Southwestern Youth Services, Inc., at (580) 482-2809.