



Calling All Courageous Parents: Local agencies announce parenting series

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By Jenna Cho,
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As a lifelong resident of Old Saybrook and a teacher in the Lyme-Old Lyme schools, Patty Cournoyer has a unique perspective on the pressures students in suburban shoreline communities face.

"You're not going to find kids in this area that are involved in gangs and the traditional troubling things that parents associate with drug use," said Cournoyer, the Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School health teacher and the school district's health coordinator. "You're going to find students who are good students, good athletes... Sometimes, the best kids make the worst choices."

This month, Cournoyer will run a free, four-session substance-abuse prevention and education program developed by Norwalk-based nonprofit The Courage to Speak Foundation called "Courageous Parenting 101."

The sessions will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursdays from March 12 to April 2 at the Lymes' Youth Service Bureau, located at 59 Lyme St. in Old Lyme. Ginger Katz, founder of The Courage to Speak, will speak at 7 p.m. today (March 5) at the middle school to kick off the program.

Katz, whose 20-year-old son Ian died in 1996 of an accidental drug overdose, created the foundation to encourage, through education and open communication, children to be drug-free.

"Courageous Parenting 101" was launched last year to help parents understand, discuss, and address substance-abuse problems in children.

"Her mission now is to help parents understand what our kids are going through," said Mary Seidner, director of the private, nonprofit Lymes' Youth Service Bureau. "I think it's such a hard thing for parents to talk about alcohol and drugs... I don't think adults have a clear picture of the true pressures that our children face today."

Seidner said the program comes at a good time for Lyme and Old Lyme. Two years ago, the Community Action for Substance Free Youth (CASFY)—the two towns' substance-abuse prevention coalition—held a youth survey on substance abuse for students in grades 7 through 11.

One statistic that surprised Seidner and other members of CASFY was the number of students who didn't think their parents frowned upon their use of alcohol.

Seidner realized then how important it was to educate both students and their parents about substance abuse, since some students might be more inclined to use alcohol or drugs if parents don't clearly state their disapproval.

Parents are encouraged to bring children in grades 6 and up to the parenting program sessions, which are sponsored by the Youth Service Bureau and CASFY and funded by the Lyme-Old Lyme Education Foundation.

"It's a wonderful way for parents to network and get support," said Cournoyer of the program, which she was trained by Katz to facilitate. "I am not holding myself up as a total parenting expert by any stretch of the imagination. But it's a forum for parents to get support and ideas and network to help them do what they know they need to do.

"And it's not just for parents who believe their kids are drug-involved. It's for every parent. To reinforce what they're already doing, to give them helpful tips for what they can be doing." Visit www.couragetospeak.org