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*Losing a son to drug overdose led Ginger Katz of Norwalk to help families avoid a similar fate. Here Katz, next to a photo of her late son Ian, speaks to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. (Photo courtesy of Courage to Speak.)*

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## Parents Urged to Speak Up about Children’s Drug Abuse

By Elanie Marotta

**T**he boy looks to be about 11. Wearing a gray, pin-striped suit, a crisp white shirt and a red tie, he smiles approvingly at his reflection in the mirror.

This athletic boy from a nice Norwalk family grew into a handsome young man, had plenty of friends and was a university honors student.

Then Ian died of a drug overdose at age 20. Today Ginger Katz, author of “Sunny’s Story: How to Save a Young Life” and CEO / founder of the Courage to Speak Foundation, Inc. is on a mission to educate parents and raise drug awareness so that the

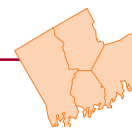
story of her son Ian will no longer be so frighteningly familiar to other families.

Ian could be anyone’s son, but parents don’t want to think – or admit – that their child could even be using drugs, let alone die so tragically.

“Parents hear about drug use, but never think it’s going to happen in their family,” she says. “They’re in denial because they view drug use as a reflection of bad parenting. But today kids are up against illegal substances at every turn. Drugs are more plentiful and more lethal than ever.”

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## Parents Urged to Speak Up about Children's Drug Abuse

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Katz says that parents must get educated about drug use – about how easy it is to get drugs on the Internet, for example, and learn to talk to their children about drugs. Further, if a problem occurs, parents need to speak up to friends and to those who offer treatment.

### Speaking Up Is Difficult for Some

Broaching the subject of drugs is difficult for many parents. “Some parents avoid topics in which they think there will be conflict,” says Dr. Larry Rosenberg, clinical director, Child Guidance Center of Southern Connecticut in Stamford. “Some might not want to find out things they’d rather not know. Most parents do attempt to talk to their kids about drugs, but it’s more of an admonition, a directive toward the child rather than a discussion.”

The easiest way for parents to talk to their children about drugs – or any other hard topic – is to talk to them all the time about everything else. If you spend time with your kids, listen to them, converse with them on a regular

basis and really get to know them and learn about how they spend their time and how they feel about things, having the courage to speak about drugs and other potentially difficult issues is as natural as conversation.

“The closer parents are to their kids, and the more they have a real connection with them, the more they’ll have the capacity for more comfortable conversation. The child

**“Parents are in denial because they view drug use as a reflection of bad parenting.”**

feels respectful, but not fearful,” says Dr. Rosenberg.

Parents might also have a problem speaking once they realize that their child is, indeed, in trouble. In addition to the worry for the child, there’s “What will people think if they find out my child is an addict?”



*Ian Eaccarino grew to be athletic, studious and popular. At age 20 drugs killed him. (Courage To Speak photo.)*

“There’s so much silence around the disease of addiction,” says Katz. “There is a stigma. Parents are ashamed of their kids being on drugs, and sometimes don’t ask for help.”

She says she didn’t know what to tell people about how her son died at first. Before Ian died, he had asked her not to tell his sister or his friends that he was in rehab. “Sometimes kids don’t ask for help right away, and their friends don’t want to betray them or get them into trouble. But this is a disease, and you need treatment,” she says. You need to have courage and speak up, regardless of what others may think.

Katz will launch a free substance abuse prevention and education program – Courageous Parenting 101 – in Norwalk in January. For more information: [www.couragetospeak.org](http://www.couragetospeak.org).

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