

The Hour Online

Educating parents on evils of drugs

By [JILL BODACH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Ginger Katz wishes there was a course that would have explained how to talk to her son about drugs.

But there wasn't; and when her son Ian died of a drug overdose in 1996, Katz wanted to find a way to help other parents avoid the pain she experienced.

At first, Katz did that by focusing on young people.

For the past 11 years, Katz has spoken to thousands of elementary, middle and high-school students about the dangers of using drugs and alcohol through the Courage to Speak program.

Now, Katz is launching a new four-session substance abuse prevention and education program just for parents called *Courageous Parenting 101*.

The program will be kick off on January 8, 2008.

In the program, parents will learn the fundamentals of substance abuse prevention, communication skills and drug trends in America. They will also learn how to find out if their children are using drugs, what to do if their child is using drugs and how to access help.

"Knowledge is power," Katz said. "I tell parents that they have to find out everything they can about what their child is going to be exposed to — every pill, every inhalant, everything — because the fact is, their child will be offered some form of drug at some point, and if they haven't been warned about the dangers, they might say yes."

The program will also teach parents how to keep the lines of communication open between them and their children, even if there are no signs that their children are using drugs or alcohol.

"You can't think 'it will never happen to my child' and think that's good enough," Katz said.

According to the American Pediatric Association, one in five fifth-graders have been drunk and one in five seventh-graders have huffed a household product.

"You need to talk to your children about drugs," Katz said. "Communication between parents and children have been shown to be a critical factor in the prevention of substance abuse by young people."

Katz is hoping that Courageous Parenting 101 will teach parents that it's okay to talk to other people about their family's struggle with drug addiction and seek help.

Katz said she realized the stigma associated with drug abuse when a "well-intentioned, but misguided" family physician suggested Katz and her husband, Larry, tell others that Ian died of a brain aneurysm.

Katz would not go along with that.

"In our gut and soul, we knew better," Katz said. "We balked. Having fought the good fight for several years we knew that denial plays an important role in the lives of young people using alcohol and other drugs. We chose instead to speak out and share the pain of Ian's reality and our horrific loss."

Anyone who is interested in becoming a facilitator or attending the inaugural parent program in January should call Ginger Katz at 1 (877) 431-3295, e-mail GKcourage@aol.com and visit www.couragetospeak.org