

The Hour

Family Night will focus on teen alcohol abuse

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NORWALK

By CHASE WRIGHT

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After a decade of declines, a new national study shows teens are more likely to abuse drugs they often encounter at parties and other social gatherings.

The topic is sure to be of discussion at The Courage to Speak Foundation's sixth annual Family Night, being held Tuesday, March 16.

The 2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study found the number of teens in grades 9-12 who used alcohol in the past month increased 11 percent from last year. Ecstasy use soared 67 percent and marijuana use jumped 19 percent among the same group, according to the study released last week by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and MetLife Foundation.

The increases are significant and point to a growing need for communication between parents and children about the harmful effects of drugs, said Ginger Katz, founder of Courage to Speak.

"We want to support our kids making good decisions and parents can have a very powerful influence," she said.

Katz, a Norwalk native, founded Courage to Speak after her son Ian died of an accidental heroin overdose in 1996. He was 20 years old.

Since then, Katz has given nearly 1,000 presentations to young people around the country to empower open communication about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

The Courage to Speak Drug Prevention Curriculum has been adopted by the Norwalk Public Schools, including West Rocks Middle School, which will host the organization's Family Night dinner.

"With the number of teens using drugs on the rise, it becomes all the more important to get the message out, and I think Family Night does that in a powerful way," said Katz.

The free event will begin at 5:30 p.m. with a pasta and pizza dinner followed by a presentation from local students and special guest Dianne Harnad, director of prevention and health promotion at the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The evening will include remarks by Mayor Richard A. Moccia and Police Chief Harry Rilling.

The Norwalk Police Department has partnered with Courage to Speak this year in "Operation Medicine Drop" to collect prescription medication at the event and dispose of the drugs in a safe manner.

This is the first such initiative ever held in the Norwalk community.

"It's something that's proven itself in a lot of different communities," said Rilling. "We know that a lot of times drug abuse begins at home in the medicine cabinet with experimentation."

I encourage people go through their medicine cabinet, gather any medication that could be considered a narcotic, and if they no longer need them, bring them to us so we can dispose of them in the proper fashion," he said. visit www.couragetospeak.org