



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



December 19, 2008 – Reclaiming the Holidays

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership Centre Region *Communities That Care*. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

The holiday season is here—a time of joyful celebration, a time of family traditions, and a time of... spending.

If asked, kids will reel off lists of must-have items which commercial ads suggest can be theirs for the asking. To make matters worse, as children get older, lists get longer and costs get higher. MP3 players, video game systems, and designer clothes don't come with cheap price tags. The current economic situation presents additional challenges as families seek ways to cut back on spending.

What's a parent to do to combat the consumerism that's become pervasive to the holiday season? To start, have a family meeting where you talk about the meaning of the holidays in your family. What are the traditions you value? What do you want most from each other?

A heart-to-heart talk may reveal some unexpected findings. While the MP3 player may not fall to the bottom of the list, what many kids want is to spend more meaningful time with parents and other loved ones over the holidays and throughout the year. While your family may have less money to spend these days, with some creative brainstorming you are likely to find that there is no shortage of ways to have fun together.

Over the holidays, make family time a priority. Instead of spending money on gifts, spend time together making presents, like baked goods, cards, or ornaments. Encourage acts of kindness, such as baking cookies to take to a shelter. Decorate a gingerbread house together, plan a holiday gathering for friends and neighbors, go sledding together. Take advantage of free activities, like Bellefonte Victorian Christmas, Polar Express, and First Night.

Holidays offer time to spend with extended family. Plan intergenerational activities that encourage interaction. For example, after a holiday dinner involve everyone in a jigsaw puzzle or game. Or plan a group craft activity like decorating a holiday table runner that will be a family keepsake for years to come.

Throughout the year, include regular family time as part of your routine. Some families have a weekly family night. Others plan a special monthly outing.

Keep a running list of things you want to do together. Hang it on the refrigerator. Routinely check places like the CDT Weekender, Family Pages, and HappyValley.com for new ideas. Put upcoming activities on your calendar.

Include grandparents and other extended family members. Some grandparents designate a regular time to get together with grandkids each week or month. Grandparents who live at a distance can still have regular chats with kids on the phone or on line.

Eat meals together as a family. The benefits are tremendous. Research shows that the more often families eat together, the less likely teens are to smoke, drink, use drugs, get depressed, or develop eating disorders (Eisenberg et al, 2008).

This year your family's holiday season can be more simple, creative, and affirming. The strong family ties that come from spending meaningful time together during the holidays and throughout the year will last a lifetime.

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