



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
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February 2009 – Talking to Your Kids Initiative

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.

Raising healthy children who have the personal characteristics, values, and skills they need to succeed as adults is one of the most gratifying jobs facing families, schools, and communities—and one of the toughest. Every day we are confronted with disturbing issues that are challenging for adults to discuss with children.

Over the coming months, the Centre County Prevention Coalition in collaboration with Centre County Communities That Care and Care Partnership: Centre Region Communities That Care will be introducing the Talking To Your Kids initiative. We will be offering practical, concrete tips and techniques for talking easily and openly with children and youth about some very tough topics, including underage drinking, tobacco, drugs, and other sensitive issues.

What children learn when they are young provides the foundation for lifelong attitudes and habits. In real life and the media, kids are being exposed to tough issues at increasingly young ages, often before they have the cognitive or emotional readiness to understand these complicated topics. It is not unusual for preschoolers to have seen adults drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes. Elementary school children may have heard about or even seen illegal drug use. By the time they are in high school, many young people have seen media portrayals of sex and violence if they have not been exposed to such issues in their own lives.

Many parents feel uncomfortable talking about tough issues with their children, or are not sure when and how to start. Others may question the appropriateness of initiating conversations about sensitive issues with children. For example, some families delay talking about alcohol because they believe that drinking is something their child would never be involved in at a young age. The truth is most children right here in Centre County try alcohol for the first time at around 12.6 years (Pennsylvania Youth Survey, 2005), long before many parents have had discussions with them about the implications of underage drinking. That's just one example of why it is important to begin talking openly and naturally about tough topics when children are young and to keep talking about them as kids are growing up.

As parents, grandparents, and others who care about children, we have a responsibility to talk with our kids about issues that are important to their healthy development first before others can confuse them with information that may be incorrect or inconsistent with family values. Children who are aware of family standards are less likely to base their developing values on what they learn from television, movies, magazines, and peers.

Open, honest, age-appropriate communication is key to ensuring that kids grow up healthy and safe. Start talking to your kids now so that they will be able to make good decisions when confronted with choices about

underage drinking, tobacco, drugs, and other risky behaviors. To find out more about the Talking To Your Kids initiative, contact Communities That Care at carepartnership@gmail.com or centrecountyctc@yahoo.com.

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