



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
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May 2009 – Smoke Signals

Jon Lodge is a State College Area High School social studies teacher and smoking cessation instructor and is advisor of the Students Talking About Tobacco Elimination club. 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.

As the S.T.A.T.E. (Students Talking About Tobacco Elimination) club advisor for the past eight years and a smoking cessation instructor for the past four years, I have seen some dramatic changes in the attitudes of students. During the first couple of years, it was easy to get students involved in S.T.A.T.E. which raises awareness about the dangers of tobacco, and it seemed “cool” not to be smoking. Today the attitude of students is more likely to be “as long as I don’t have to be around it, so what.” But when every day approximately 3,600 children between 12 and 17 years of age smoke their first cigarette, an estimated 1,100 of them will become regular smokers, and half of those will ultimately die from their habit, it is hard to have such a passive attitude (<http://www.lungusa.org/site/c.dvLUK900E/b.39871/>).

Legislation has eliminated some of the most obvious advertising methods tobacco companies once used so now they promote tobacco through movies, magazines with a young readership base, and merchandise such as bags and hats. Most young smokers (81.3 percent) prefer Marlboro, Camel and Newport which are heavily advertised brands. Promotion aimed toward young girls has increased recently. In 2008, Philip Morris started marketing superslim Virginia Slims in mauve and teal sleek purse packs which resemble packages of cosmetics. In 2007, R.J. Reynolds launched a new version of Camel cigarettes in shiny black boxes with hot pink and teal borders which they advertise with flowery imagery and vintage fashion (http://tobaccofreekids.org/reports/women_new/).

The number one reason I hear from students in my cessation class as to why they smoke is “it relieves my stress.” Students also say they use tobacco because it is something to do while hanging out with their friends. Many smoke before or after school hanging out around Weis market, and others use smokeless tobacco when they are fishing or hunting with friends. These social activities then become habitual as the nicotine addiction becomes stronger.

So what can parents do to help prevent tobacco use? The first thing I would say is to keep the lines of communication open between you and your child. Talk to your kids about their daily activities and bring up smoking in those conversations. Help them find alternatives to relieve their stress in positive ways. Parents need to help their sons and daughters to be proud of themselves and develop self-confidence. Have conversations with your kids about how they can respond to peer pressure by saying things like, “I am going out for the track team this year and I don’t want to hurt my chances,” or “My Grandfather died from emphysema and I took it really hard so I choose not to smoke,” or “My parents would be very upset if they caught me smoking.” These are just some of the ways that parents can help their children be prepared for times when they might be tempted to use tobacco. Research has shown that if people can make it till their 18th birthday without smoking, most never will.

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