



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



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Kate McGrail-Peasley is a school counselor with the Bald Eagle Area School District. 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.

Local *Communities That Care*® initiatives support Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS) because research has shown that the elementary school curriculum contributes to preventing negative outcomes for youth. Problems like delinquency, teen pregnancy, violence, substance use, and school dropout decrease in areas where proven-effective programs are used. Programs, such as PATHS, teach students life skills to be successful socially and academically. You can reinforce the concepts taught in PATHS with the youth in your life.

Identify feelings. Parents and caring adults can help children learn and identify emotions by labeling their own feelings and those of the child. For example: “It must be pretty frustrating when your brother keeps taking your legos without asking. What could you do to solve this problem?” or “I’m pretty angry now. Let’s discuss this when I have calmed down.”

Validate all feelings. All feelings are OK, but not all behaviors are OK. It’s OK for a child to be angry, it’s not OK for them to be violent or hurtful. Once in awhile, most children express their anger in unacceptable ways. When reprimands do not separate the behavior from the child and their emotions, children may begin to believe that feelings, such as anger, jealousy, or frustration are bad and that they are bad for feeling them. As a caring adult, have the child acknowledge their feelings and teach acceptable ways to calm down and express feelings like taking a bike ride, screaming into a pillow, or talking with a trusted adult.

Reinforce the control signals at home. Have youth draw a control signal for use at home. Post it in place where all family members can see it and try using it during a family or sibling disagreement.

Give compliments often. Try to make your compliments specific. “You are the most wonderful child in the world!” is a great way to tell your child you love them, but a specific compliment reinforces a certain positive attribute, talent or effort that the child has demonstrated. For example: “I like the way you remembered to clear your plate from the table after supper. Thanks!” or “Even though your team lost, I liked the way you hung in there and kept trying until the end. Good game!”

Use the Turtle Journal for family compliments. In younger grades, students may take turns bringing home “Twiggle” the turtle and a journal that offers family members the opportunity to write compliments in for the student.

Caregiver letters and refrigerator notes are sent home from school to explain PATHS lessons and to encourage use of the techniques at home. Read and discuss the letters with your child and post the refrigerator notes, so all family members can use them.

Support PATHS lessons in your school. Show teachers, school administrators, and youth that you care about what is being learned and that you want schools to invest in prevention. The social and emotional skills taught in PATHS are life skills that make our schools, families, and communities safer and stronger.

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