

Neighbors: Talk. They Hear You.

Chelsea Neighbors | Posted: Wednesday, July 30, 2014 6:16 pm

Summer is coming to a close and most of our community youth are heading back to school. Some are transitioning to middle school, others are beginning their high school career and a portion is anxiously awaiting the start of their freshman year of college. It is an exciting time for students who are growing and learning so much about the world and culture they live in; however it is frightening for parents who understand and have experienced the world and culture they live in. One frightening experience with growing adolescents is ensuring your child is prepared to deal with peer pressure and experiences relating to underage drinking and drug use.

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2011, a survey found that among high school students 39 percent had consumed alcohol, 8 percent drove a motorized vehicle after consuming alcohol and 24 percent had ridden with a driver who had consumed alcohol. A "Monitoring the Future" survey" conducted in 2011 concluded that 33 percent of eighth-graders had tried alcohol. The numbers are frightening and they continue to rise with the average age of first sip dropping lower and lower each year. Currently, the national average of first use is 12 according to MADD.

In May of 2013, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) launched a new underage campaign entitled "Talk. They Hear You." This campaign was composed to encourage parents and caregivers to talk with their youth about drugs and alcohol. SAMHSA provides vital information and tools parents need to start talking to their youth. The campaign encourages starting talking to youth at nine.

With the success of the campaign through 2013, SAMHSA is launching a mobile app with the same name for parents who are on the go. This app is available beginning this summer. According to SAMHSA, the app is an evidence-based behavioral tool that uses avatars to engage in life-like conversations and it is structured as a 10-15 minutes virtual role play. Allows parents to assume their role and engage in intelligent and emotionally responsive conversations to better prepare them to talk with their own child(ren). The role-play adapts to different questions and responses to ensure a well-rounded experience for parent and child.

It is so important for parents to speak with their child(ren). Parents play a vital role in adolescent decision making. Let them know how you feel about their decisions. The campaign slogan is so simple but so true: "Talk. They hear you."

For more information about talking with adolescents, visit www.samhsa.org or call East Alabama Mental Health-Prevention Department at 334-737-2908.

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