

SAFE believes parents can help their teen avoid smoking

The troubling combination of teens and tobacco has been an issue as far back as most people can remember. Many young people believe smoking is sexy, will help them lose weight, or make them more popular with their peers.

SAFE PRIDE Coalition recognizes the problem these misconceptions are causing among youth, but believe they can be squashed if parents and caregivers open up the lines of communication. SAFE encourages parents to speak to their children driving home the message that tobacco use is not a sign of maturity, and that most adults who started using tobacco as teens later regretted it.

Perhaps a few other pieces of valuable information will help them too. There are many short-term effects of choosing to become a smoker that parents can use to help stop their teen from smoking. They include: a higher likelihood of respiratory problems, shortness of breath (certainly a problem for a teen that wants to excel at sports), impaired lung growth and function, bad breath, yellow teeth and stained fingers.

If these short-term effects do not dissuade them, try discussing the long-term effects which include: addiction to nicotine and exposure to other dangerous chemicals, lung, mouth, throat, kidney, and stomach cancers, coronary heart disease, emphysema and other chronic diseases, and a shorter lifespan — up to 20 years shorter.

Some teens are not strong enough to know how to deal with peer pressure. SAFE encourages parents to help their teens prepare in advance for certain situations. To deal with peers, they can always say they are not allowed to smoke and that it is impossible to hide it from their parents because of the smell tobacco leaves behind.

Parents should take advantage of teachable moments to discuss tobacco use. Commenting on an advertisement or TV show that shows someone smoking can be useful as well as acknowledging anti-smoking commercials. If a parent sees someone using tobacco, such as a relative at a family gathering or one of their own friends, they should ask their teen what they think about it. SAFE believes opening the doors of communication with teens is the way to go to stop tobacco use. Talk they will listen.

Over the last several years SAFE has partnered with the Tobacco Action Coalition of LI (TAC) and the city in many initiatives to de-normalize smoking for our impressionable youth. Carol Meschkow, the Nassau Project Coordinator for TAC says “leading by example is so important, and she is very proud of the fruits of this collaborative effort in changing the social norms in the city to prevent the next generation of smokers. Sadly, 9 out of 10 smokers start by the age of 18 and 99% by the age of 26. TAC, welcomes parents and their younger children to visit our site on the web at: <http://www.dogbreath.org> for some great interactive learning and wonderful parent resource materials to keep the conversation going.”

For further information on any SAFE, Inc. PRIDE Project Coalition and their initiatives contact Coalition Coordinator Aimee Abraham at 516-676-2008. SAFE Inc. is a not for profit tax-exempt substance abuse education and prevention agency located in Glen Cove. Visit our website at www.safeglencove.org and follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GlenCovePrideCoalition.