

Parents: Don't be Left Behind!

By Rachel Gordon

Photos provided by notMYkid

notMYkid joined forces with the Tempe Union High School District's "No Parent Left Behind" workshop series to educate parents on substance abuse prevention. Parents gathered to learn about teen substance abuse at the "Project 7th Grade and Beyond into High School" workshop at the Tempe Public Library.

The average age for first time drug usage is 13 years old; drug use triples between the sixth and eighth grades and of those kids who report experimenting 34% of them will become regular users. The statistics were shocking to many parents; they didn't realize that drug use was something they needed to be concerned about with middle school students. They felt that their kids were still safe. One mother commented, "I came here tonight to hear about ways to protect my two older kids. I didn't think there was any reason to be worried about my seventh grader, but boy, was I wrong."

Parents must be concerned about preventing substance abuse while their kids are in middle school. By high school it often becomes a drug intervention. On average, teens are using drugs for two years before their parents find out.

There is a disconnect between parents and teens according to the 2008 CASA survey. CASA, which is a court-appointed advocacy group for children, reports that teens, ages 12-17, rank drugs as their number one concern. Parents, meanwhile, think it's social pressures; they don't even think their kids are worried about drugs. Kids want to fit in at almost any cost: they want to have friends, they want to be liked. If what their friends are doing goes against what they believe is right, they'll do it anyway for fear of not being able to be a part of the crowd.

"Parents have to understand the pressures kids face, it's not the same world it was when we were in school. Drugs are everywhere and your

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kids are exposed to them," said Ric Borom, Director of Adult Education Services for notMYkid. Ric is a former school resource officer and Gilbert Police Officer, in addition to having been the principal of a charter high school for at-risk youth. He led the parent workshop and shared his experiences and insights with the gathered parents. Borom spent four years as the SRO at Highland High School "I went in there, I got to know your kids. I knew where to get drugs, which kids had them and which kids were the wannabes. I made friends with your kids. Much of what I'll show you tonight are things that I confiscated from kids."



Ric Borom, Director of Adult Education Services

He asked the parents how many of them thought their kids could buy drugs on their school campus. Only a few brave ones raised their hands. "Actually, almost every one of your kids can buy marijuana at school today," he told the crowd. "Of 17 year olds, 86% can buy pot within the day. That means your kids know who to go to -- to get drugs." He said parents have to realize that drugs are out there, they have to take steps to protect their children.

"50% of the parents you ask think their kids go to a drug-free school. This might

be true if you're home schooling your kids, and there are at most two or three other kids plus no older siblings around your kids that go to a school that has drugs on campus. I'm not trying to scare you, just sharing the reality of the situation with you. Drugs are in your kid's school" says Borom.

An alarming trend in teen substance abuse is the use of prescription pain pills. Teens have a false sense of security about drugs, because they're prescribed by a doctor, that the pills can't hurt them. They hold "pharming parties" where the kids all bring a handful of pills from home and toss them into a bowl. Each kid takes a couple of pills and swallows them. They have no idea what they're taking or what the reactions might be. The interaction between the medications can be fatal. In fact, in Arizona twice as many kids die from prescription drug abuse as do from car accidents.

Ric asked parents "Where are your prescription pain pills right now? Are they locked up in the safe? Are they hidden? Or are they just in the medicine cabinet?" Most parents said they were just in the medicine cabinet. "When you get home I want you to move them, lock them up like valuables. They are dangerous and kids are abusing them and they're not getting them from drug dealers. They're getting them from home." Only

9% of prescription drugs come from drug dealers, 65% of the kids get them from either their home or a friend or relative's home medicine cabinet (CASA 2008).

Ric talked to the parents about creating a family drug prevention plan, talking to their kids about drugs but doing more, taking action to protect them. notMYkid distributed home drug test kits that were donated by First Check to each family in attendance. It's much easier for a kid to say, "I can't do that, my parents have a home drug test kit and I'll get caught", than to be the one in the group to say, "I don't want to try it". Kids are exposed to drugs. 50% of the kids ages 12-17 who stay out until 10pm on school nights say that smoking marijuana, drinking and other drug use occurs according to the 2008 CASA survey on teen trends. Home drug testing is thought of as a positive reinforcement. Parents are encouraged to establish a routine while their kids are in middle school so they're set for high school. "By talking to your kids about drugs and taking action, you can know that your kid will say, 'no' when their friends are saying, 'yes.' Preventing drug use is a parental responsibility. Take that burden back from the kids and let us do our jobs. If we have to be the bad guy to protect them, so be it." Ric said.

Upcoming "No Parent Left Behind" notMYkid workshops will focus on: teen depression and self-injury, eating disorders, safe dating and healthy relationships and binge drinking/ alcohol abuse. notMYkid is based in Phoenix and works with schools all across the valley to educate parents, students and teachers about destructive youth behaviors. For more information on notMYkid call 602.652.0163 or visit www.notMYkid.org. No Parent Left Behind University is a creation of the Tempe Union High School District. Several workshops are held each month dealing with all different topics. For more information on No Parent Left Behind University, visit the Parent Community Service Office at Marcos de Niza High School or email Kay Cosner, kcosner.mdn@tuhsd.k12.az.us