

Communities that Care

COALITION

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NEWS ADVISORY

Local Teen Health Survey Confirms National Research on Critical Role of Adults in Teens' Lives

The 2010 Franklin County/North Quabbin Youth Risk Behavior Survey, released at the semiannual meeting of the Communities That Cares Coalition in Greenfield today, reveals the critical role adults play in helping local teens to make healthy choices.

Teens who have adults to talk to about things that are important to them are far less likely to engage in risky behaviors than their peers who say they do not have adults they can turn to.

“We knew that adults can make a difference in the lives of young people, but when we saw the data, we were blown away by just how much those relationships seem to matter,” said Martin Espinola, Director of Grants and Technology of the Gill-Montague Regional School District, and long-time member of the Communities That Care Regional School Health Task Force.

For example, local teens who say they do not have a parent or other adult at home to talk to about important things are two and a half times more likely to be current cigarette smokers than their peers who can talk with an adult at home, and twice as likely to be current users of marijuana. The correlations for stronger drugs are even greater. Teens without an adult at home to talk to are four times more likely to have tried cocaine and six times more likely to have tried methamphetamines than their peers who can talk with an adult at home.

The survey also shows that teen relationships with teachers and other adults at school are highly influential in the choices teens make, both in and out of school.

The pattern holds for every risky behavior examined in the 101-item survey. Local young people who have adults to talk to are far less likely than their peers to fight or carry weapons, to drink and drive, to cut or hurt themselves on purpose, to engage in risky sexual behaviors, and to use unhealthy weight loss methods.

These findings fall in line with the latest research about the importance of Parent-Child Connectedness and School Connectedness.

Parent Child Connectedness is a construct researchers at ETR Associates and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation have identified as a “super protector” that helps young people negotiate life’s challenges. School Connectedness, defined as the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals, is being promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a strong protective factor against substance abuse, school absenteeism, early sexual initiation, violence and risk of unintentional injury.

The Teen Health Survey is an anonymous survey of over 2,000 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students in 9 Franklin County and North Quabbin public school districts. The full 2010 report is attached, and requests for additional data and further analyses may be directed to Jeanette Voas, Evaluation Coordinator at the Community Coalition for Teens (jvoas@frcog.org or 413-774-1194 x119).