

Family Dinners Together can Prevent Substance Abuse

Research shows that no one has more power to prevent kids from using substances than parents. One of the simplest and most effective ways for parents to be engaged in teens' lives is by having frequent family dinners.

This year the Student Assistance Counselors in the Warwick Public Schools are focusing on the importance of parental involvement in the lives of teens to prevent substance abuse. There are no silver bullets, but one factor that does reduce teen's substance abuse risk more than almost any other is *parental engagement*. Meals spent together provide an opportunity to discuss issues of importance, provide support and simply have fun.

A report published by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University states, "Frequent family dining is associated with lower rates of teen smoking, drinking, and illegal drug use and prescription drug abuse." The same report tells us that when teens were asked when is the best time to talk to their parents, the majority responded during or after dinner. Parents agreed that dinners together provided a good place to discuss important issues. The research also states that teens that have fewer than 3 family dinners in a week are more than twice as likely to do poorly in school.

The Student Assistance Program in the Warwick public schools celebrates its 25th year. Counselors are available to speak with students and parents around issues related to alcohol and other drug use. "We understand that many families are busy and have commitments at the end of the day that prevent the possibility of a shared meal time, however, juggling schedules to include even a few shared meals during the week can make a difference" state counselors. For more information on the Columbia University research go to <http://www.casacolumbia.org/templates/PressReleases.aspx?articleid=653&zoneid=87>.

The Student Assistance Program works closely with and is supported by the Warwick Youth Programs Advisory/Task Force and will continue to provide tips to reduce teen substance abuse. High school Student Assistance Counselor can be contacted for questions or help.

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