



- > Home
- > Front Page
- > Features
- > Communtiy
- > Columns
- > Classifieds
- > Contact Us
- > Archives
- > Letters

## Parents learn tips to help keep kids off drugs, alcohol at READI Drug and Alcohol Parenting Seminar

By Matt Liebowitz

"Listen." That was the predominant message voiced by experts at the Feb. 19 Drug and Alcohol Parent Seminar presented by the San Dieguito Union High School District's READI (Recovery Education Alcohol Drug Instruction) program. The seminar was held at Canyon Crest Academy.

It was advice stressed repeatedly by the professionals on the eight-member panel, which included Katie Barr, a licensed clinical social worker with more than 16 years experience; Joseph Olesky, a district substance abuse counselor in the READI program; Susie Walton, a parenting coach and recipient of San Diego Parent Educator of the Year; and Judie Strang, executive director of the San Dieguito Alliance for Drug Free Youth (SDA).

It was, perhaps more resonantly, echoed by Ari Dadkhah, a 17-year-old Torrey Pines High School senior, and Tom Lerum, an 18-year-old senior at Canyon Crest Academy; the two students joined the panel as part of SDA's Teen Presenters Program.

Regarding how he's stayed drug and alcohol free, Lerum spoke to the overriding importance of a strong family core.

"If you let your kids know you care," Lerum told the approximately 100 attendees gathered in the library of Canyon Crest Academy, "they're not going to want to let you down."

Lerum said he never had a formal conversation with his parents where he was told not to drink, but said that his family always has dinner together. "Just talk and communicate," he said.

Speaking about her large Persian family, Dadkhah added, "I don't want to let them down and break their trust."

The importance of listening and maintaining open lines of communication was a sentiment supported, from a professional and parental standpoint, by the panel.

"It's not about being their friend," said Barr. "They're not going to like you all the time, but you have to keep on top of them."

Urging parents to listen to their children's conversations with friends, Barr said, "Never stop talking."

San Diego Ranch Coast News  
Local Search

search

"When a window of opportunity opens, listen," said Walton. She reminded parents to never approach their children with an agenda, and to refrain from judging them.

"They need to know you're there to listen," she said. Walton then told parents to never say to their children 'I can't trust you.'

"That will just make them react negatively," she said. If a child makes a mistake, Walton said to say, "It looks like you're not ready to handle this responsibility"; the subtle shift in phrasing will spur the child to behave correctly rather than feel like a failure.

Barr again stressed the importance of silence and listening, and not forcing kids to talk against their will.

"Don't pester and question kids," she said. "If you see something's wrong, offer an ear, but don't harp."

Barr also told parents to "be a united front," and not to send mixed messages to kids. If there's a disagreement, she said, it should be addressed behind closed doors.

Both in her capacity with the San Dieguito Alliance for Drug Free Youth, as well as by her experience raising seven kids, Strang advocated a forthright approach to dealing with kids who may be susceptible to drug and alcohol use.

Strang said to be "extraordinarily cautious" about parties kids are attending, and to set up a controlled environment at home, where kids — and their friends — know drug and alcohol use is not allowed. She also cited the Social Host Ordinance, which imposes fines and potential jail time for parents who facilitate underage drinking at private residences.

"The biggest gift you can give your children is to let them see what you value," Strang said. "Communicate your standards to them."

Olesky reminded the crowd that the READI program offers a weekly Parent Life Ring Support Group every Tuesday at San Dieguito High School Academy. The group is dedicated to informing and empowering parents about how to deal with issues of drugs and alcohol.

Much of the meeting focused on the causes that lead to kids taking drugs, and how, as parents, to be proactive and prevent children from going down that path.

As a caveat that held true throughout the meeting, Olesky said, "We're here to be candid with you. If older kids are using drugs, their younger siblings are going to experiment. We ask parents to really be on top of it. We don't want younger kids falling into that trap."

Peer pressure, depression, and the desire to fit into a social group in high school are reasons many kids begin taking drugs, said Olesky.

Both teen presenters agreed, adding personal experience to the statement.

"It's about acceptance," said Lerum. "Friends play such a big influence in kids' lives. Watch out for who your kids hang out with. If their friends are drinking and doing drugs, chances are they are too."

To combat this negative peer pressure, Dadkhah said she became involved in extracurricular activities, which bolstered her confidence and gave her aspirations. She is on the Torrey Pines Varsity swim team, is a member of the National Honors Society, and volunteers at a hospital.

Like Dadkhah, Lerum's self confidence comes from sports — he is the captain of the Canyon Crest water polo team and president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes club— as well as the friends with whom he's chosen to associate. His friends support his decision not to drink and fuel his self-confidence by sticking up for that decision, often a difficult one among teens.

"Surround yourself with good friends," Lerum said. "It's the best thing you can do."

Picking up on Lerum's assertion that friends play a primary role in kids' choices, Olesky voiced his belief that parents should have the names and numbers of all their children's friends.

Regarding intervening if a child has already begun drinking or using drugs, Walton said, "Don't ignore it. Don't wait until they get into harder drugs."

Walton added, "If you don't want your kids to drink, don't keep it in the house. Don't promote it and don't provide it."

Barr also added the importance of holding kids accountable for their actions.

"Don't bail them out," she said. "It's important they experience natural consequences."

While much of the meeting centered on the scary realities facing teens, and the difficult choices they — and parents — need to make to stay drug free, the panel never veered into using scare tactics. Instead, it placed the greatest importance on not just listening and keeping open lines of communication, but stressed how even the most minor connection in a child's life can prove immensely powerful.

Strang recalled the times she would stop by where one of her kids was skateboarding with his friends. Calling it "drive-by parenting," Strang would show up with food for her son and his friends; although this particular son was difficult and distanced from her, she said just the fact that she took the time to be present and show how much she cared proved an invaluable tool for dealing with a child that was hard to reach. Recalling a similar instance, in which she would drive downtown from Del Mar to bring meatball subs to her two teenage sons before their basketball games, Walton said, "You don't have to do a lot. It's the small connections. The little things are what kids will remember."

Responding to a question about how to connect with kids as their lives become increasingly busy, Walton said, "Think about what you used to do when they were young, and make it happen.

Once they're in college," she joked, "basically they just come back to eat."

"Always make time," added Olesky. "Make memories that will last them down the road."

**W.A. Stone**  
TERMITE & PEST CONTROL INC.  
ALTERNATIVES to FUMIGATION  
ask for STONEY 1-800-559-7999  
www.WASTONE.com

**ZIP**  
Fusion Sushi & Grill  
Happy Hour  
5pm-6:30pm Mon.-Thurs.  
858.755.3130  
11130 East Ocean Air Drive Suite 101 • San Diego, CA 92130

**Tabu sushi**  
Bar & Grill  
tabusushibar.com  
858.755.5585

**Boston's**  
THE GOURMET PIZZA  
294 N. El Camino Real  
Encinitas, CA • 760-753-6300  
FREE APPETIZER  
WITH PURCHASE OF TWO ADULT ENTREE'S OR A LARGE GOURMET PIZZA

**Hangers**  
CLEANERS  
2008 Reader's Choice "Best of First Place"  
Take Advantage of Hangers  
CO2 DRYCLEANING  
STIMULUS PLAN

**CLASSY CLOSETS**  
Image of a modern closet with wooden drawers and hanging clothes.

Again, supplementing the expert panel, it was the teens' words that rang true and powerful. "Let your kids find something they're truly interested in," said Lerum, "and support them 110 percent." As simple as it sounded, Dadkhah's statement summed up an integral factor that has kept her off drugs and alcohol. "Be there," she said. Information about the READI program can be found by calling Olesky or Tiffany Findell at (760) 753-1121, or by visiting <http://teachers.sduhsd.net/READI>.

