

Promising Practices: Parent Networks

Challenge

The job of parenting teens is not easy; both teens and parents are often busy and away from home much of the day. Research has shown that kids who have caring and engaged parents are less likely to be involved in risky activities and more likely to do well in school. But, parent involvement typically drops off for kids when they reach middle school age.

Parents need encouragement and support so they will stay engaged and connected with their kids throughout their teen years, provide healthy role models for youth, and help each other in the parenting process. Parents can help each other by working together.

Parent Networks Description

Designed to reduce teen involvement with alcohol and drugs and encourage safe environments for our youth, Parent Networks connect parents with other parents. Parent Networks are typically organized in school districts by parents and school leaders to support each other in their roles as effective parents and communicators with their children. Parent Networks help create the following opportunities:

- Set common codes of conduct and standards for our children
- Share parenting strategies
- Learn about important youth issues
- Reduce the use of alcohol and drugs by youth
- Help them decrease risky behaviors

Parent Networks help link parents together to use the following Positive Parenting Practices:

1. Encourage and sponsor wholesome activities for youth
2. Communicate with other parents about youth activities
3. Set agreed-upon curfews for young people
4. Emphasize the importance of school
5. Agree to be positive role models

Connections to national/state models

Parent Networks have been established in many school districts around the country. Typically, the development of Parent Networks is a grassroots process. Materials are shared from district to district and revised for local use. Great Lakes Center for Youth Development (GLCYD) has developed a generic brochure, PowerPoint presentation, and sample directory that can be shared.

Results

Parent Networks can improve the safety and well-being of youth in communities; however, little formal evaluation of models is documented. To help gain results, GLCYD has developed evaluation instruments for parents and their teenage children and has studied the results in one school district.

Many of the Promising Parenting Practices are part of the 40 Developmental Assets:

- Family Support
- Positive Family Communication
- Parent Involvement in Schooling
- Other Adult Relationships
- Family Boundaries
- High Expectations
- Safety
- Time at Home
- Honesty
- Responsibility
- Restraint
- Planning and Decision Making
- Resistance Skills

Parent Networks help promote and support parenting behaviors that build assets. Research on assets in youth has found that the more assets youth have, the less likely they are to be involved in risky behaviors and the more likely they are to demonstrate thriving behaviors. Parents have reported that they feel supported in their efforts to monitor their children's activities and promote staying substance-free.

Four Steps to Starting a Parent Network

1. Adopt the Promising Parenting Practices as common guidelines for the Parent Network
2. Recruit parents to join the Network and follow these guidelines in support of each other

3. To help accomplish their active parenting roles, print a Parent Network Directory and distribute to Network members to help parents contact each other about youth activities
4. Parent Networks then sponsor activities for parents and youth that are substance free and safe such as a family tailgate party before the homecoming game or dances

Target

- Parents of school-age children (especially middle and high school students)
- School Districts

Sponsor Summary

Information on how to start a Parent Network is available from Marquette General Health System's Women's & Children's Center and Great Lakes Center for Youth Development.

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