

Substance

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substances.”

Trends

Mowrey said that Fountain Hills mirrors the rest of the state in the three substances that are currently the most used by teens. These include alcohol, marijuana and a newer entry on the list, e-cigarettes.

The inclusion of e-cigarettes is important because it demonstrates another point Mowrey emphasizes, that the fight against underage substance abuse is always changing.

Back when the local coalition first formed, the biggest substance abuse issue facing local teens was alcohol consumption. In more recent years, that's shifted to prescription drug misuse. Now, e-cigarettes are the big trend.

The good news, according to Mowrey, is that Fountain Hills serves as proof that a concerted effort by members of the community is a powerful tool to educate parents and teens and tackle these types of substance abuse concerns.

A “Safe Homes Network” was begun, for instance, which encourages parents to pledge to not host drinking parties in their homes. That was just one prong of community outreach to impact underage drinking, and change occurred.

“These kinds of efforts raise awareness and, over time, we were able to impact the number of youths using alcohol,” Mowrey said. “When I [joined] the coalition about six years

ago, 11 percent of youth in Fountain Hills reported they were regularly using a prescription pain reliever, which is extremely dangerous.”

By using the same focus on community outreach and education, working with everyone from the town government and law enforcement to the schools, local businesses and parents directly, the number of local teens misusing prescription drugs dropped to 1 percent in 2018. According to the most recent survey, more teens are now using e-cigarettes than alcohol, making it the next major focus for the coalition.

Dangers

While the trendy substance may change over time, the dangers of teen consumption have not. Whether you're talking about alcohol or narcotics, substance abuse can impact the growth and development of teens, especially brain development. It also has an impact on risky behaviors and can contribute to the development of additional issues down the road, such as health problems, heart disease and sleep disorders.

In short, teen bodies and minds are still developing and pretty much any foreign substance being introduced into the body can have major negative impacts on that process.

“Nine out of 10 of our most seriously addicted adults today started as teenagers,” Mowrey said. “The younger you start, the greater the impact on everything from tolerance to dependence and addiction.”

“Life is hard enough. Adding a substance in there affects everything from your grades and job to interactions with law enforcement and personal relationships. So much destruction happens around substance abuse. If we can keep our kids drug free at least through their teen years, they're likely to never develop an addiction as an adult.”

The average age for first drug use in Maricopa County is 13 with the average age of first alcohol use being 12.

“For that reason, I always tell parents to back that up about five or six years,” Mowrey said. “Talk to your kids at 13 about the things you know they'll have to deal with at 18 and they'll be more open to those conversations. If kids are using drugs and alcohol at 12 and 13, we need to be talking to them much earlier.”

Evolution

So if every generation gets their own version of “just say no” hammered into their brains as kids, why do issues with youth substance abuse continue?

According to Mowrey, it has a lot to do with the fact that it's an ever-evolving issue.

As noted, local trends shifted from alcohol to prescription drugs to e-cigarettes.

“Modern kids are more comfortable with technology and e-cigarettes are just another tech product to them,” Mowrey said. “But it's a drug delivery system via a technology piece.”

Mowrey said “generational forgetfulness” is also part of the problem in keeping up with the more recent dangerous trends.

“While we're focused on one thing, there's already something else in the works,” she said.

Causes

Causes for youth substance abuse are varied, ranging from peer pressure and plain curiosity to trauma or conflicts with friends. Mowrey noted that high expectations in areas such as academics are increasingly leading to substance abuse as modern teenagers seek a way to “just relax” for a few minutes.

Modern teens live in a constantly connected world of smartphones, streaming personalities and social media. There are more ways than ever to feel overwhelmed, meaning teens have more reasons than ever to seek an escape from all of the noise. For some, they seek that escape in drugs and alcohol.

Communication

The first warning sign, according to Mowrey, is gut instinct.

“If you think there's something wrong, there's something wrong and you need to investigate it,” she said.

Mowrey recommends parents seek to keep in contact with their teens at what she calls “crossroads.”

“Crossroads are when they come home from school, being out on a date or just out with friends,” Mowrey explained. “When they walk in that door you get a chance to interact with them and they're more open to communication in those moments.”

Are your teen's eyes bloodshot? Are they more confrontational or frequently caught lying? Have they started hanging out with new friends? Is there a history of substance abuse in your family? These are just some of the warning signs Mowrey said parents should be on the lookout for if there is a concern of substance abuse.

When it comes to having “the talk,” Mowrey suggests parents be on the same page, have a plan and remember that this is a conversation, not a confrontation.

Tips

Mowrey suggests that the reactions and conse-



Substance abuse in teens continues to be an issue, ranging from alcohol and marijuana to prescription drug misuse and vaping.

quences should reflect the severity of the issue. If you discover your child is using more serious substances, for instance, it may be appropriate to go straight to intervention.

“To me, if a kid came home after drinking, that's a no negotiation situation and you lose your car,” Mowrey said.

If you catch your teen vaping, though, it may be a better tact to take major consequences off of the table initially, instead making it clear that the teen's health comes first.

“You need to know how long they've been using and where they've been getting it before moving forward,” Mowrey continued. “You have to ask them what's going on in their life that led them to using and make sure they understand it's too important an issue to dismiss.”

Mowrey said it's hard and will likely be awkward

but, eventually and through continued effort, a parent and teen can find the root cause and address it.

Hope

If a parent doesn't seem to be getting through to their teen or simply needs some guidance, Mowrey said it's never a bad idea to reach out for help, be it from a school counselor or outside entity. She recommended Teen Lifeline as a good source of information and guidance (teenlifeline.org), as well as organizations like the National Parent Hotline (1-855-4A-PARENT).

“By the time we find out our kids are using, it's likely been a problem for a while,” Mowrey said. “The first time you catch them coming home after drinking, that's not the first time they've done it. They've just gotten brave enough with their drinking to feel

comfortable getting behind the wheel and driving.

“Keeping that in mind, we realize that once we discover these issues, we've already lost some time in the whole intervention process...so you need to act immediately.”

“People recover every single day. You can get through it. Does everybody? No. There are times when you do everything humanly possible as a parent but, unfortunately, your child continues to make those dangerous decisions and continues to use. You have to know that's a changed child, in terms of their brain and their needs. But you have to have that hope and to never lose communication with that young adult.”

“There are tremendous resources out there now and different types of treatments...It's a hard road, but recovery is always possible and there is always hope.”

Coalition

The Fountain Hills Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition is a local group dedicated to working with the community to reduce substance abuse in teens.

The organization includes members from a variety of sectors including town government, local schools, businesses, clubs, law enforcement and community members.

The group's website can be found at fhcoalition.org and offers information on everything from the Safe Homes Network and prescription drug disposal to resources for parents, information about community and school outreach and more.

The coalition hosts regular meetings, with the next taking place on Thursday, Oct. 3, at 9 a.m. in the Fountain Hills Unified School District Community Learning Center.

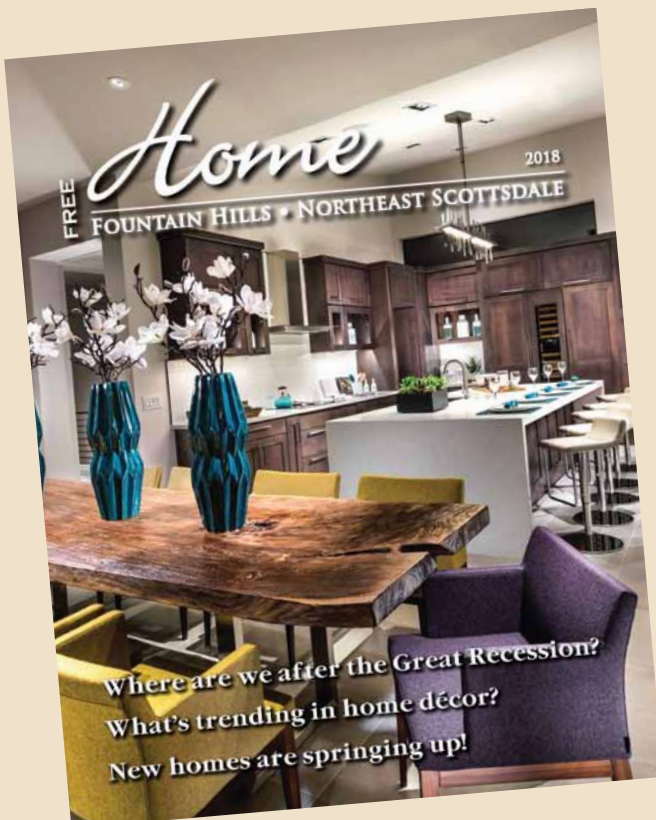


Proclamation

Mayor Ginny Dickey, second from right, presents Kara Paschal and members of her family with a Mayoral Proclamation declaring September as Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. Paschal made the request that the mayor make the proclamation in memory of Russell Alvin Faulk, Jr. who passed away in 2017 at the age of 65.

Home

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Magazine is distributed in 85268 and mailed to 85259. Advertising deadline is October 18.

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Brownie badge

Maricopa County Sheriff's deputies talked with Fountain Hills Brownie Troop 4333 about safety so the girls could earn their public safety badge. Pictured is Deputy Robert Palumbo presenting Scarlett Grieco with her badge.