

OPINION: Time to 'Start Talking' to kids about drugs

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By Karen W. Kasich

No family or neighborhood – affluent or disadvantaged, urban or rural – is immune to the dangers of drugs. It's naïve to think that any of us can shield our children from peer pressure or the stresses of life. However, we can empower our children to handle those situations with confidence. We can educate ourselves, connect with our communities and start talking to our children about drugs.

You may be surprised to learn what a powerful tool conversation can be – I was. Research shows that children whose parents talk early and often about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use are 50 percent less likely to use in the first place. But for many of us, having those conversations can be easier said than done. When it comes to talking to our kids about tough issues like drug abuse, it can be hard to know just what to say and how to say it. As parents to twin 14-year-old girls, my husband and I have struggled with it, too. But we all have to face our own fears and talk with our kids about drugs – the drugs on the street and the drugs in our medicine cabinets.

That's why Ohio is launching "Start Talking!" – a new drug abuse-prevention initiative aimed at our young people. "Start Talking!" provides parents and adults with the support they need to have those hard conversations. To accompany the initiative, we've launched a website that offers free tools for parents (as well as teachers and community leaders) that will help them confidently and effectively present the facts to adolescents and teens.

Prescription medications, especially, are a huge risk and temptation to our young people. Every day, more than 2,000 kids use a prescription drug to get high for the first time. As parents, we must recognize that all medicines, including prescription medications, have risks as well as benefits. "Start Talking!" hones in on the dangers of prescription medicines, which are misused and shared inappropriately all too often – and have become an increasing cause of disability and death across the nation and Ohio.

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