

Dakota event encourages families to talk about ‘tough stuff’

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By Nicole Tuttle Voice Reporter



The North Entrance of Dakota High School in Macomb Township will be used for “Talking About the Tough Stuff” Family Night Out on March 26. Photo by NICOLE TUTTLE

If there are four dreaded subjects parents dare not ignore when they have teens, they are relationships, appropriate technology use, alcohol and drugs.

The Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families is hoping to make these difficult discussions easier by hosting a family night out event on March 26 dedicated to dealing with these topics.

“Talking About the Tough Stuff” Family Night Out will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Dakota High School in Macomb Township. Seating at the event is limited, so interested participants must R.S.V.P. by March 24 by contacting 586-723-2872 or slange@cvs.k12.mi.us. Entry will be at the school’s North Entrance, and the event will be held in the large group instruction room on the left. The free event will include a pizza dinner as parents and teens in grades six to 12 dig in to difficult topics with Dakota High School Student Assistance Specialist Stephanie Lange.

“I will present the info for thought and then the small groups will have their guided discussions,” Lange said.

The main concepts of the evening will be to reinforce three messages, according to Lange. The messages are that parents are the most powerful educators and influences on their children that if they do not teach their children what they need to know they will learn it elsewhere from influences that parents may not agree with; and that no matter how old a child becomes, they need parental role models to reinforce values.

“Our core belief was that parents want to have these conversations, but do not always know how to get them started,” Lange said.

Handouts and talking points for technology, drugs, relationships and reproductive health will be offered, according to Lange. Research from a variety of Internet sources will also be offered, but nothing in particular will be endorsed, Lange said.

“Each family is unique and has to decide what is best for their family,” Lange said.

Teens from the Coalition Teen Council might also discuss what they wish their parents had said to them in elementary or middle school about the discussion topics, but this part of the program has yet to be firmly settled, Lange said.

The topic for the family night out was selected in response to a request from the Chippewa Valley Reproductive Health Advisory Board, according to Lange.

“Chippewa Valley Reproductive Health Advisory Board continued to discuss how it would be great if parents talked more to their children about sex and dangers of risky behavior,” Lange said. “Schools can do a lot to educate students, but a parent is the most powerful teacher for these kinds of topics. We decided to just go for it and see if parents wanted to learn more about how to engage their child in this kind of talk.”

To further the discussion, families will be seated with others they do not live with for small group discussions, Lange mentioned.

“This will allow for different points of view to be shared. Then we encourage families to continue the conversation together,” Lange said.

Groups will be asked to consider the most surprising and hopeful thing that was presented during the evening, then focus on the topics that they are most interested in, Lange added.

“It is meant to be a jumping off point for the community to have these discussions. So just the beginning ... not the end,” she said.

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