



Monisha Nayar, a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology tells Farmington Families in Action parents that the necessary first step in solving problems is listening and talking with their teenagers.

Talking with your kids help solve problems

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Good communication between parent and teen-ager begins with identifying problems.

"We can't deal with teen-agers the way we deal with 6- or 7-year-olds," said Monisha Nayar, a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Wayne State University.

She was speaking before members of Farmington Families in Action. The group was sponsoring a drug awareness conference at the Alexander Hamilton office complex in Farmington Hills.

Communication skills can help families deal with substance abuse problems, as well as other problems, Nayar said.

"Depending on the kind of problem, the approach you take will vary."

"Communication is the basis of a good relationship," she said. Often, young people and parents approach communicating in the wrong way.

"There's a lot of yelling and screaming, put-downs, and demands. It's not that they don't want to communicate, necessarily, but they just haven't learned the skills."

COMPROMISE, she said, is essential.

"Generating alternative solutions is an aspect of problem-solving. If we can teach young people this, that is something they can take on with them."

"Each person states what actions of the other are creating problems for him or her," Nayar said.

Each then paraphrases what the other has said, and then works on alternative solutions to the problem.

It's important to avoid making judgments initially, she said. Calling possible solutions dumb or unrealistic tends to build walls between parent and child.

Choosing the solution that will work best involves projecting the consequences of each action, she said.

"We do that, again, in an environment which is conducive to smooth communication."

Nayar, who has a private practice at the Beacon Hill Clinic in Birmingham,

is working on a research project with Dr. Arthur Robin, a child psychologist at Detroit's Children's Hospital. The project involves looking at parent-adolescent relationships in different families, using a 400-item questionnaire.

"We ask parents and teen-agers to fill it out separately," she said. "We're looking at different types of families." Those who are interested in participating may call Children's Hospital at 464-4878.

Tuesday's conference was held to increase awareness of substance abuse problems.

"Just education and awareness for the community," said Betty Nicolay, the organization's president. The group held its first such conference last year.

"It lent itself to thinking," said Jerry Potter, principal at Farmington High School, of Jane Williams' presentation. (See related story.) "It was very factual and interesting. The knowledge we gained is certainly going to be helpful."

"I think there is definitely a need, and I'm happy to be here," said Pat Hinz of the Oakland County Youth Assistance program. She found a film shown on cocaine to be helpful.

"I didn't know a whole lot about cocaine, and I thought that was interesting."



Monisha Nayar

Kids of alcoholics have their ills

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Children of alcoholic parents may appear to be well-adjusted, good students who stay out of trouble. Their behavior may, however, mask serious problems.

"It's not always the kid who's in trouble," said Jane Williams, education director for the Farmington Area Advisory Council. "These can be your National Honor Society kids."

Approximately 20 percent of U.S. children come from homes which in-

clude an alcoholic member. Williams told those attending Tuesday's Farmington Families in Action conference on drug awareness. Those youngsters often behave in ways that make their problems difficult to spot.

"It all develops into a very strong denial system. By that time, they've learned to play the family game." Such young people become used to inappropriate behavior, accepting a parent's drunken behavior as the norm.

"They've really learned to push those feelings down, and they're not worried. They're numb."

DENIAL AND "frozen feelings are common in such families, she said. The "no-talk rule" — fear of airing the family's dirty linen in public — also makes treatment difficult.

"They really don't know how to feel, and it's something they have to relearn."

Some children from such homes do fit the stereotype of the problem child.

"These are the ones you school people know as burn-outs," Williams said. Others, however, are overly responsible perfectionists who have taken on a parental role and missed out on child-

hood in the bargain.

The "burn-outs" are, in some ways, easier to treat than the perfectionists are, Williams said. Although they often lack social skills and have difficulty dealing with authority figures, they are generally more honest about their feelings than perfectionists are.

Other young people take on the role of caretaker, or household social worker, dealing with other family members' pain while ignoring their own. "Class clown behavior" may also result.

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Student smoking ban clears C'ville air

By Teri Banas
staff writer

The smoke has cleared at Clarenceville High School.

Five months into an effort to ban smoking on school grounds, administrators now say they've put a healthy kick into the cigarette smoking habit there.

No longer do visitors driving into the parking lot see smokers gather at the one-time infamous "wall" to light up between classes. No longer are the bathrooms smoke-filled turn-offs to the majority of non-smokers in the 650-student high school.

In fact, the turn-around has not only received public praise from the Board of Education, but recently received attention from the American Lung Association which awarded the school district serving parts of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford Township with a special plaque for its achievement.

"It's getting along better than I ever hoped for in the initial stages," said Principal DeWayne Nutter. "Everybody's been working together on this and we've had considerable success."

That was not a certainty last summer when despite some skepticism the Board of Education decided to try once again to do something about the smoking problem at the high school. Superintendent Michael Shibley, who was new to the district at the time and in favor of a crackdown on conduct, was fully behind the attempt.

THE DECISION and ultimate success was contingent on cooperation from the entire school community. And they got it. The board increased the penalty for smoking from a one-day suspension to a much harsher three-day suspension. Teachers were asked to regularly police bathrooms, parents were informed, and students were asked to refrain from smoking inside the building as well as around it in consideration of themselves and their classmates.

"There was very little resistance and much support from the students," Nutter said. "And the staff in general pitched in and began checking the areas of the building."

"I'm not naive enough to think the students have stopped smoking entirely. They still can leave the building site during their lunch hours. Overall, it's focused some attention on smoking and the hazards."

Nutter said there's been a decrease in the numbers of students found smoking, as well as a noticeable difference in the school atmosphere and behavior of the students between classes.

There were 18 students suspended from school because of smoking since the start of the 1984-85 school year and Thanksgiving, compared to 23 suspended during the same time last year.

"And now there's a much more concerted effort being made to cover all the areas of the building," he added.

THE ATMOSPHERE in the building also has changed for the better, he said. Students no longer rush outside between classes to grab a cigarette at "the wall," a fence border along the north end of the campus property and a one-time allowed smoking area. As a result, class tardiness has decreased.

The change has been well welcomed by non-smoking students.

Junior Theresa Holbrooks, 16, says there's been a definite difference inside the building and washrooms this year.

"Now everyone doesn't have to put up with it (smoking). It has mainly been put to a halt," she said.

Sophomore Amy Keating, 15, says she doesn't believe the crack-down has caused student smokers to give up the habit. "I think they just find somewhere else to do it. I don't know where," she said.

And Nutter, who was a smoker, himself, until he stopped three years ago for the last time, appreciates it, too. Last year between 25-30 students regularly spent their break times at "the wall," located within viewing distance of the principal's office.

"It didn't look it; I never like it since coming here five years ago," he said.

Interestingly enough, few staff members smoke cigarettes at Clarenceville. The building principal could only think of two teachers out a 34-member staff who smoke cigarettes. None of the secretaries smoke.

"This building is practically smoke-free," he said.

SHIBLEY, meanwhile, takes the success in stride.

"Whether it's done in a large high school or a small high school, I believe in the adage that you get what you expect. It simply comes down to establishing what you believe in and following through. And it's working."

The American Lung Association, in commenting on the school's award, noted "more and more high schools are returning to 'no smoking' policies prevalent two decades ago. . . students for the most part are supportive of these policies because smoking has become a health issue and kids are into good health," the release stated.

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