

Drug program uses teen approach with youngsters

A drug abuse program in Livonia and Westland is trying to get elementary and junior high students to take another look at why "kids" begin experimenting with alcohol and drugs.

John Farrar, executive director of the Community Commission on Drug Abuse, said the effort involves having high school students appear before younger students to talk about and explain how peer pressure works.

"We want to get at what leads to substance abuse — peer pressure and self-concept problems," Farrar said.

One exercise is geared to acquaint-

ing the youngsters with the problem of coping with peer pressure. The exercise presents a young student with a simple choice — do something which makes no sense, or make the seeming right choice.

Making it difficult, however, is the fact that at least 50 percent of the student's fellow classmates yell at the student urging the student to make the unwise choice.

THROUGH THIS exercise, the young students get an idea of the power of peer pressure.

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Farrar said he instituted a new approach because teaching students to cope with peer pressure and their own problems of feeling inadequate seems to be the strongest way of discouraging alcohol or drug experimentation. The old drug programs "focused spe-

cifically on the drugs," Farrar said. Police officers would come in to schools with cases of drugs, show students the different kinds of drugs and then tell the students it was wrong to take those drugs, Farrar explained.

A study by the University of Michi-

gan's Institute on Social Research "showed that this approach actually made drugs more attractive to kids," Farrar said.

But the new program developed by CODA takes the approach that "this is your body and you've got to take care of it," he said.

YOUNG STUDENTS, even those in early elementary grades, are well aware of some of the drugs and alcohol cases.

In a typical program before a class of fifth-graders at Roosevelt Elemen-

tary School in Livonia, two Livonia-Bentley High School seniors — Jenny Bookmeier and Briant Kling — talked to the students about drugs and drinking.

"How many of you have tasted beer or wine?" Briant asked. All but two students raised their hands.

"Where did these fifth graders get a 'taste'?" From their parents' glasses, they said.

"How did you feel?" Briant asked.

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