

In charge: Cindy Helisek is the coordinator of the BABES program.



Learn: Lanigan third graders use hand puppets to learn lessons about drug and alcohol abuse in the BABE program.

# BABES: A beginning

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It might take baby steps to tackle a huge problem in American society, that of substance abuse. But if that is the case, so be it, said Cindi Helisek, coordinator of the BABES program being presented throughout Farmington Public Schools.

At least it's a start.

"It's appropriate for third graders," emphasized Helisek about the materials delivered to kids in the Farmington Families in Action program. "It's not going to save the world. But it's a

beginning."

Helisek recently talked about BABES, Beginning Alcohol and Addiction Basic Education Studies, between a pair of 30-minute presentations before third graders at Lanigan Elementary School.

In essence, she explained, youngsters learn coping strategies and receive basic information about drugs and alcohol — and about the negative behaviors often triggered by substances. Lessons are augmented by the use of activity pages,

(This marks another installment of Today's Lesson, which chronicles classroom activities in Farmington Public Schools.)

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A stuffed bunny rabbit toy and children's book held up by Cindi Helisek in front of a third-grade class at Lanigan Elementary School almost belied the serious subject matter.

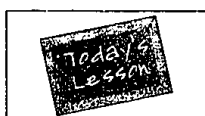
Helisek, coordinator of the Farmington Families in Action BABES program, discussed the stories of bunny rabbit characters named Rhonda and Reggie and how their lives were adversely affected by alcohol.

BABES, "Beginning Alcohol and Addiction Basic Education Studies," is an age-appropriate program developed by the National Council on Alcoholism.

"Rhonda is new to the neighborhood," reads Helisek. "Her family moves a lot, so she has no chance to make friends she can trust."

As Helisek continues the 30-minute session, she notes that Rhonda is sad and shy because she feels alone. She asks the students for their opinion about why the character is unhappy.

Rhonda's apparent sadness began when she "came home to an empty house," Helisek said. "She had no friends and had only jelly and bread to eat. All the rest of the BABES gang were outside playing. You see, Rhonda's mom drinks a lot of alcohol



and abuses it."

From there, the discussion moves to the topic of responsible use of alcohol by adults.

"Who is able to drink responsibly?" asks Helisek the students.

"Persons over 21," said a few third graders in unison. "For religious ceremonies," chimed in another.

**Oh-oh**

Helisek then carried on with the story of how alcohol abuse prompts people to do and say hurtful things they normally wouldn't. For example: Rhonda is awakened when her mom and boyfriend Jenks fight, apparently an altercation stemming from their having too much to drink.

"Rhonda is upset and she begins to cry," Helisek continues. "Her mom said, 'Why are you crying?' But she couldn't (answer). Her mom slapped her across the face to stop. Why

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would she do something like that? She was drunk. But Rhonda knew her mom is not always that way."

The hurtful, embarrassing situation, Helisek said, is enough for Rhonda to have that "oh-oh feeling, ... that little flip-flop in your stomach that something is not right," and she's not quite sure whether she should say anything to someone like a

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