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coalition news

Prevention news and information from the Tiverton Prevention Coalition

Tiverton's Student Assistance Counselor Offers Emotional Safety Net for Students

Many students come to school with more than backpacks filled with books. They carry the weight of social and emotional problems — and those problems do affect performance in school. If left unaddressed, they also increase the danger of experimenting with drugs or engaging in other risky behaviors.

Just ask Edith Borden, a licensed clinical social worker and employee of [EBCAP](#), who has served as the [Student Assistance Counselor](#) at Tiverton's middle and high schools for nearly 15 years. During this school year alone, Edith, as she's known to the kids, has seen about 100 middle school students and 60 high school students — many on a weekly basis — to help them through a variety of problems, including anxiety, feelings of social isolation, bereavement, conflicts at home, parents going through a divorce or other family crisis.

"We have to address life events before a child can really focus on school," Edith said. "Some are good at detachment. They're able to leave family problems on the curb when they get on the school bus every morning. But many cannot and need to learn some coping skills."

Edith introduces relaxation techniques to many of the students she counsels. "Teaching them how to relax, often just by taking time to breathe, helps them to 'step outside of themselves,' so they can see their problems more objectively. Then, we can begin to discuss effective ways to problem solve."

Edith also conducts a monthly bereavement group. Some students in the group, now in high school, have been attending since sixth grade. "Everyone deals with issues of loss differently," Edith said, "but kids who have lost a loved one may feel they cannot manage the normal issues of adolescence. Other kids in school may not be able to identify

with them, while the group members can offer empathy and support. There's comfort in knowing you're not the only one dealing with these issues."

Edith works closely with the school nurse and guidance counselors, who often refer students to her. Sometimes Edith meets with students who need more intensive therapy and they will be referred to services outside school.

"Students in the middle and high schools are facing the same kinds of issues that adolescents have always faced," Edith added, "questions like: Who am I? Who do I want to be? How do I fit in to my world? However, life has become more

complicated with the increased use of technology and the added distractions and pressures put on parents and teens in this modern world. Family life has changed, existence is fast paced, and adolescence is more stressful than it has ever been."

Anyone with questions about the Student Assistance Program may contact Edith at the high school (401. 624.8494, Ext. 234), the middle school (401.624.6762) or by [e-mail](#).

Divorce
Depression
Pressure
Isolation
Anxiety
Bereavement





REBECCA'S notes

The [Above the Influence](#) (ATI) Campaign took root at Tiverton High School on April 14 when the Coalition sponsored a week of activities to celebrate all of the positive and healthy choices that THS students are making.

High schoolers face an incredible number of pressures: friends and peers, stress, relationships, self-image, drugs and alcohol, pop culture and bullying. ATI gives kids a venue to talk about the ways that they “stay above” the negative influences that they confront. During ATI Week students participated in “Mix It Up Monday,” which featured an opportunity to start a new dialog at the lunch tables using conversation starter cards. Tuesday provided an opportunity for students to participate in a contest to design the official 2014-2015 ATI logo. “Wear It Wednesday” encouraged students to dress in a way that indicates what activities keep them above negative influences. Great examples included sports jerseys, martial arts uniforms, horseback riding gear — and one student carrying around a palette and paintbrushes. “Thirsty Thursday” was the grand finale: three special “mocktails” were served during lunch to signify the importance of alcohol-free socializing.

The concept behind ATI is to emphasize that the majority of young people are doing the right things, making safe and healthy choices, most of the time — contrary to popular opinion!

Spoiler Alert: Barbie is NOT real

Jeff Heath was ready for snickering eighth grade boys when they saw him “playing” with a Barbie doll. Actually, he explained, he wasn’t playing; he was measuring.

Fifth and eighth girls in Jeff’s health education class at TMS are now constructing a six-foot version of Barbie and he wanted to make sure the proportions of the life-size Barbie corresponded to the doll that, he laments, “too many girls get when they’re three or four years old.”

“Barbie is often the first visual impression girls get about what the female body should look like, and it’s a false impression. Today they’re bombarded with celebrities and social media that give the same false impression -- and that does contribute



Mr. Heath and Barbie-in-Progress. Check out Columbia University Dr. Laura Azzarito’s [research in body image](#), one of Jeff’s inspirations for the “Barbie Project.” Jeff is currently in a Ph.D program at URI.

to poor nutrition and exercise habits,” Jeff said. “I want them to see their bodies as beautiful the way they are. It’s how you take care of them that really matters.”

One current example that Jeff mentioned was a group of eighth grade girls who don’t eat lunch. “They think that it’s ‘gross’ for boys to see them eat,” he said. “It’s all about body image.”

While the unit is focused on female body image, boys need the same lesson, Jeff explained, because they can reinforce those false impressions themselves when they respond to the body image instead of the person.

The class has had its lighter moments. When discussing why some eighth grade girls think it’s “gross” to eat in front of boys, Jeff posed this question to the boys in the class, “What would you think of a girl who could wolf down five hotdogs?” One boy, speaking for the group, said, “We’d be in love.”

Looking to the future, Jeff’s goal is to teach at a college and specialize in the effect of female body image on physical education. For now, he’s doing that right here in Tiverton.

Comments? Questions? Interests?
Call 401-835-5311 or send us an email at Rebecca@tivertonprevention.org.
www.TivertonPrevention.org

