



Casper Star-Tribune
Parenting with Purpose: Fighting substance abuse

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By: Jean Davies, Executive Director of the Wyoming Meth Project

According to a 2006 survey by the U.S. Department of Health, Wyoming ranked second in the country for use of methamphetamine by teens ages 12 to 17.

Meth use among youth is considered especially tragic because of the severe and often irreversible damage the drug can cause. Chronic use leads to severe weight loss and exhaustion, tremors, ataxia, disturbances of the cardiac rhythm, pain in the muscles and joints, and reduced resistance to infections. Among other things, meth rots the teeth and can permanently damage blood vessels in the brain. Meth decreases appetite, blood flow, and saliva. It increases the heart rate to the extent that sudden heart failure can occur under physical strain.

While progress has been made in Wyoming to combat many of the aspects of meth abuse, without an ongoing, vigilant effort to rid the state of this drug, meth will continue destroying the lives of our young people and tearing at the fabric of our communities. It will strain the limits of Wyoming's law enforcement, prison and foster care systems. The social costs are staggering and the human costs incalculable.

One of the most important ways to stop the spread of meth is through education and prevention. Teens need to know how dangerous this drug really is. Parents need to be able to recognize the warning signs that their kids may be using, and everyone in our community needs to know who to reach out to for help with addiction.

In June, the Wyoming Meth Project officially launched. It is a large-scale prevention program aimed at reducing first-time meth use through public service messaging, public policy and community outreach. Presentations in Cheyenne schools were attended by over 700 students and community meetings in Sheridan drew interest from businesses, school officials and the Center for a Vital Community. In Casper, there have been community meetings with prevention leaders and students to get the word out that "Not Even Once" is the message to remember when confronted with opportunity to try meth.

Wyoming recognized the magnitude of the challenge of dealing with meth and responded more rapidly than many states. Because of our action, we are seeing progress in the fight against meth. Teens, young adults, and parents are increasingly aware of the negative consequences of meth use. It is time to redouble our effort, have people young and old get involved and communities take action. Meth prevention and education can work to finish the job in Wyoming.

* Look here every other week for "Parenting with Purpose," a column presented by the Natrona County Prevention Coalition family and parenting committee. The columns focus on building healthy families while highlighting family events, classes and activities. For more information on the coalition, dedicated to preventing substance abuse and forming healthy communities, visit www.ncpreventioncoalition.net.

Meth conference

* What: The sixth annual Wyoming Methamphetamine and Substance Abuse Conference featuring workshops and training sessions for nurses, teachers, mental health professionals and members of law enforcement. The conference is open to the public.

* When: Wednesday and Thursday. Wednesday night is the free community session with a panel of recovery addicts and a family impact panel.

* Where: Parkway Plaza Hotel and Convention Centre in Casper

* Featured speakers: Clarence Thomas, White Buffalo Recovery; Katherine Wells, M.D., Kempe Center; Bob Pennal, California Department of Justice; Honorable Judge Hartman, Juvenile Justice Issues; and Chris Rose, The Meth Project.

* Registration: Call Mary Ellen Stewart at 235-8225 or go to www.casperwy.gov to register online.

What to watch for

Here are a few warning signs that a loved one may be struggling with meth addiction:

* Speech: Talkative, rapid and confused speech.

* Appearance: Extreme weight loss, tooth decay, loss of muscle tone, dilated pupils.

* Behavior: Extreme mood changes, euphoria, anger, insomnia, extreme aggression, paranoia, depression, fatigue, hyperactivity, relaxed inhibitions, inability to concentrate, restlessness.

Source: Wyoming Meth Project and Natrona County Substance Abuse Providers

Learn more about meth and meth prevention at www.wyomingmethproject.org.

Parenting Calendar

* Love and Logic Parenting: Presented by Nutrition and Child Development, this class features hands-on tools to make parenting easier. Call Theresa at 237-1496 or e-mail trishazeller@wyoncd.org for more information. To learn more about the program, visit www.loveandlogic.com.

* Mercer House's 'Baby Steps': A support and educational-play group for parents of children birth to 5 years old. 3:30 to 5 p.m. every Monday. Call facilitator Kathy Herter at 265-7366 for information.

* Online parenting class: "Parenting Wisely," sponsored by Mercer House. For parents of children 8 to 18 years old. Teaches assertive discipline, using "I" statements, contracting with your teen, active listening and more. It also includes three support group sessions. Call facilitator Debbie Mueller at 265-7366 for more information.

* Red Cross classes: American Red Cross of Natrona County offers classes in CPR, First Aid, baby-sitter training and more. For information, call 237-8436.

* Parent-education seminar: The Wyoming Children's Access Network provides parent-education seminars for divorcing, separated, and never-married parents. The one-time, four-hour seminar is provided monthly in Casper and other cities around the state. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and other adults close to the children are welcome to attend. There is a nominal fee that may be waived upon request, based on need. Preregistration is required 24 hours in advance. Call (866) 726-3700.

* UPLIFT Fathers' Focus Group: Meets from 1 to 2:30 p.m. on the fourth Saturday of each month in the UPLIFT office at 145 S. Durbin St. Suite 201. UPLIFT provides support, education and advocacy for families with children who struggle with emotional, behavioral and mental disorders. www.upliftwy.org.