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HEADLINE: HELPING TEENS FIGHT ADDICTION TO DRUGS, LIQUOR

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Joel, a handsome 18-year-old, choked back tears as he told how drugs destroyed his relationship with his father.

From a close friendship in which Joel and his dad spent time

3/10/2004 9:08 PM

hunting and fishing together, their bond deteriorated to the point of physical blows.

"Just talking about it is like a nightmare," said Joel, now drug-free after nine months of therapy. "A lot of times people don't believe me; sometimes I don't believe it myself. It's like I was a different person."

Joel told his story in front of approximately 200 people in Thomas Jefferson School auditorium Tuesday night as part of a countywide drug awareness program for parents, students, and educators.

Based on peer pressure

The session was conducted by Dr. **Miller Newton**, president of KIDS of Bergen County, a River Edge-based program founded on the premise that if peer pressure got students involved with drugs, peer pressure can get them to stop.

Newton said that most teen-age drug use starts with marijuana and alcohol. He added that the first few times teen-agers experiment with drugs, nothing particularly harmful happens.

"And the result is everything we adults told our kids about the horrors of drugs blows away in one fell swoop," Newton said. "Pretty soon the kid becomes less afraid of drugs and tries harder drugs."

With the second stage of drug use, Newton said, parents can begin to see subtle changes in their children's behavior. They begin to drop out of after-school activities and grades are affected.

It is usually at this point that parents get angry and demand that the student shape up, Newton said. The result is that the student, "with a little effort or a little cheating," will improve grades.

A dull buzz'

"That's when parents will sigh and say, Thank God, not my kid, we got the problem fixed.' And of course they will ignore another symptom," Newton said.

The final stage of drug addiction is when the user ingests drugs so often that he "can't get high, just a dull buzz feeling."

"At this point, the kids are burnouts, zombies. They are walking dead," Newton said.

Newton became involved in the KIDS program when he discovered his youngest son, Mark, was using drugs. Mark was 15 at the time.

Newton told parents they can combat the widespread problem of drug abuse by educating themselves and getting tough on their children.

"Parents who deliver a convincing message get their point across.

To give that tough bottom line on drugs, know what your talking about," he said.

Recognize drug paraphernalia. Know what it means if your child carries a container of eye drops, Newton said. Drops commonly are used by marijuana smokers so eyes are not glassy and red.

Newton said the most important is for parents to establish honest, open lines of communication with children and show them a lot of love.

"No kid started out to become a druggie," said Newton, adding that peer pressure is responsible and parents must regain control.

"We've got to knock off this idea that kids and adults are equal; this idea that they must be friends. So what if they're angry with us?

They can be friends with us later when they come home with the grandchildren," Newton said.

Newton is coauthor of a book, "Not My Kid," which details the KIDS program. The book was the subject of a recent television movie of the

same name.

GRAPHIC: Staff photo by Klaus-Peter Steitz - Dr. **Miller Newton** speaking to parents, teachers, and students.

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