

SCHOOLS INTRODUCE DRUG-INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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Bill Deaton, his voice cracking, recalled how his son - ``my pride and joy`` - had cursed him one day.

His boy had changed. Once a Little Leaguer who shared a close relationship with his father, Deaton`s son had become uncommunicative, disruptive and even suicidal.

Behind it all, the Gaston County parent told Cabarrus County educators this week, was his son`s use of drugs, ranging from alcohol to ``acid,`` better known as LSD.

``We couldn`t go to bed at night, because we feared another police car would come to our house with our son,`` said Deaton, who retired early from his job as an assistant technician with AT&T to help in his son`s battle with drugs.

Deaton spoke to more than 150 Cabarrus County school system administrators and teachers Monday at Concord Middle School as part of a program to train school officials to recognize students who are in trouble with drugs.

Along with Deaton, a 17-year-old Mecklenburg County girl who has been enrolled in four different drug treatment programs and a counselor from Gastonia`s Rotary Adolescent Treatment Center told their stories as the school system introduced its intervention program to staff members.

The program, aimed at middle school and high school students, was set up on the recommendation of the school system`s Alcohol and Drug Task Force, a 30-member group that began meeting during the summer.

``We are not going to be a vigilante group, or go out on a witch hunt, or go around accusing people,`` Ed Tyson, associate superintendent of the school system, said Monday in explaining the program to teachers. ``We want to help those young people who are involved with drugs or alcohol.``

Under the program, teachers will look for signs, such as poor attendance or sleeping in class, that students might be abusing alcohol or other drugs. If a teacher notices any such behavior in a student, the teacher will confidentially forward the student`s name to a voluntary committee of school staff members. The committee will review those reports to see whether further action is needed.

The first step in taking further action will be for the school to contact the student`s parents and inform them of the school staff`s concerns. The parents also might be asked to have their child evaluated for possible addiction to alcohol or other drugs.

``If these children have the disease of addiction, they will not outgrow it,`` said Jan Bigart, a counselor at the Gastonia center, which is treating Deaton`s son and the 17-year-old.

It is normal, Bigart said, for adolescents to try drugs, but constant drug use may signal addiction, which could hinder their development.

The 17-year-old, who wanted to be known only by her first name, Lisa, told the gathering she hadn`t thought smoking marijuana would lead to trouble.

She started smoking pot at age 14. ``I thought it was great,`` Lisa said. ``It was wonderful. It was the best I ever felt.``

Over the next two years, Lisa said, she also used alcohol, hashish and

psilocybin mushrooms and left home to live on the streets. ``When you are in the drug crowd, all you think about is getting high,`` she said.

But Lisa says she has been clean - without drugs - for 15 months.

``I've learned that you don't need drugs to have a good time or feel good about yourself,`` she said.

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