

News

Johnstown Middle School students learn about drug abuse

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Johnstown, Cambria County, Pa. - Education is a buzzword when it comes to preventing drug abuse, but what does that look like?

Thursday morning, 6th graders at Johnstown Middle School learned how to make good decisions.

As part of the Botvin Lifeskills Training, students learn about drugs and substance abuse: like where marijuana comes from, what are its side effects and how can drug use hurt a developing brain?

Botvin Lifeskills Training is an evidence-based substance abuse prevention program.

"Not only does it prevent drug use, but it prevents violence, which is a great thing here for our community," said Kate Porter, the education prevention specialist for the Cambria County Drug Coalition.

In Cambria and Somerset County, Botvin is funded by nonprofits and substance abuse prevention agencies, including United Way of the Laurel Highlands, Twin Lakes Center, County SCA's, Cambria County Drug Coalition, Somerset Drug Free Communities and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

It first launched in area schools in 2011. Now, it's reached more than 7,000 students in all 24 school districts in the two counties.

In the first four years, statistics show decreases in alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use for 6th - 12th graders.

The program teaches students about the dangers of substance abuse, along with coping and social skills and how to resist peer pressure.

"It focuses on self-image, how to cope with anger, how to cope with anxiety. It does have lessons on tobacco, marijuana and alcohol. However, the point of the program is to build resilient youth," Porter said. "So, I believe that if we start young, we will give the youth the skills that they need by the time they are faced with these tough decisions."

Next year, the Greater Johnstown School District will add the training for 5th graders. The Cambria County

Drug Coalition is also working to bring the curriculum to 3rd graders across the county.

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