

ARCH

A r e s i d e n t s c a r i n g & H e l p i n g

Working to Keep Kids Alcohol & Drug Free

The end of the school year is filled with celebrations. Musical concerts, graduations, play-off games fill the calendar.

For families with 5th grade students in Tredyffrin/Easttown, that includes a graduation from the D.A.R.E. program (drug & alcohol resistance education).* On June 9, more than one-hundred parents attended the morning ceremony at T/E Middle School. Nine of the 250+ graduates (10-11 years old) were selected to read their essays. The topic was "What I learned during the DARE program." While the quality of writing was impressive, it was the enthusiasm and conviction of all the students – that they will not let alcohol and other harmful drugs ruin their future – that made the listeners smile with optimism. One after another told of facts they'd learned as well as trick/tips for resisting peer pressure. These adolescent children announced that they had a choice. Of course, we parents were beaming – with high expectations and hope that they'll feel the same way in three or four years.

The DARE Program in T/E is taught by Tredyffrin Police Officer James Mutter. Officer Mutter brings to DARE a blend of cold law and parent's compassion. He is a parent of two teen boys. His strong presence continues to make an impact on the kids. He earns their respect. He is the reason for the program's success.

How is the success of DARE measured? Can we know who among the graduates might remember one of these lessons as they sit at a party at age 14 or 15 and unexpectedly have to accept or decline an offer to "take a hit?" Will Officer Mutter's message that, beyond what you see on Youtube or the news, the Police are the good guys and have your best interest at heart, resonate for years to come?

The DARE program is just one piece of drug and alcohol resistance training for our kids. The schools will provide more. However, parents are the real anti-drug. As our pre-teens navigate their new-found independence, as they start to make their own social plans, more than ever, parents need to stay involved. Keep meeting their friends' parents. Keep asking where they are going and what they are doing. Parents need to keep learning. Just as you might have flipped through "What to expect when You're Expecting," now as they turn eleven and twelve – make it a point to learn "what to expect when your feeding, clothing and loving a Middle School student."

Parent Coalitions exist to keep that dialogue going. ARCH (Area Resident Caring and Helping) is just such an organization. The workshop topics may vary from year to year, but middle and high school parents are urged to keep an eye out for programs offered by ARCH. The intention of the group is help parents make informed decisions.

"Good parenting is inconvenient." Officer Mutter said that to a group of parents a few years back. He went on to explain that it's not fun to make the unpopular choice for your child. It can be awkward as you go to the door and introduce yourself when dropping your 13-year-old child at an unfamiliar home – when everyone else is just dropping their child at the end of the driveway. Asking questions about who will be chaperoning events can be awkward, even among parents who are friendly. One goal of ARCH is to promote dialogue among parents. The more parents and care-givers talk, the less awkward the conversations become.

Is everyone going to make the same choices? Absolutely not. Parenting is as individual as our children are. But, if more parents are confident that they are making informed decisions and not decisions driven by their child's level of embarrassment – the more likely we are to have success. Success is letting our now 10/11 year old – soon to be 14/15 year old – know that they have choices and there are consequences in life.

I support DARE. I support ARCH.
Gwenn Mascioli
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* VFMS students graduate from DARE in December