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Strict parents help youth avoid tobacco

By Tony Carrick
STAFF WRITER

Children who have authoritative parents are less likely to use tobacco, according to a study done by a University of North Carolina at Greensboro professor.

A survey administered last spring by Anne Fletcher, an assistant professor of human development and family studies, and her assistant, Stacey Adamczyk, also revealed that youths with authoritative parents tend to be more well adjusted.

"Kids who have authoritative parents at a given moment in time tend not to be smoking," Fletcher said.

"They are well adjusted in a variety of ways: higher self-esteem, doing better in school, less likely to use drugs and alcohol and less likely to use tobacco."

According to Fletcher, authoritative parents tend to have three characteristics in common:

"They are warm and responsive to their children's needs," she said. "They provide firm, consistent limits on their children's behavior."

"They accept their children's ideas and opinions even when those ideas and opinions aren't necessarily similar to their own," she added.

"It's when those three come together that a child is doing very well."

Authoritative parenting also helps to steer youths toward friends and positive peer groups who are less likely to experiment with tobacco.

The study revealed that while authoritative parenting helps to prevent teen smoking for both boys and girls, it works differently for each gender.

"Authoritative parents tend to communicate to their daughters that if you use tobacco and we find out about it, there will be serious major consequences at home," Fletcher said.

"The daughters (refrain) from smoking because they don't want to get into trouble at home."

"Authoritative parents (tend to) guide their sons toward peer groups in which there are very low levels of tobacco use."

Fletcher came to these conclusions by surveying eighth-graders about their use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco and their relationship with their parents.

Middle school is usually when kids decide whether or not to experiment with illicit substances, she said, so the eighth grade seemed a logical focus for the study.

Fletcher emphasized that parenting usually determines how a child will interact outside the home.

"The parents should remember that when they use authoritative parenting, they are setting in motion a whole system of positive supports for their child even beyond the home," she said. "It's something that parents often forget."

Fletcher's study is under review by a professional journal and conference. If it gains approval, the study will be presented at a national conference in early 1999.

Define "authoritative" parenting.

AD → Brandeis -
parenting skills adv.
- training
- how to talk to kids
effectively.

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