

PV schools offering parenting seminar

By Rachel Poor | [No comments posted.](#)

Parents, are you dreading "The Talk?"

On Oct. 8, Mary Ann McLeod, of Bethany for Children and Families, and Libbet Brooke, from Edgerton Health Center, will offer a free seminar at Pleasant Valley High School to help parents learn to communicate effectively with their children about the sensitive topics of sex and development. "Know What to Say" is a program funded by the Iowa Department of Human Services and has been offering advice to parents and teachers for four years.

The presentation starts with a movie featuring students pretending to be parents talking to their kids about sex. This usually breaks the ice. McLeod and Brooke go on to discuss the clip and why parents are so nervous talking about sex and ways to make it more comfortable. Communication is the most important part — keeping dialogue open and providing continuous, age-appropriate information, they said. They also address the societal double standard and the importance of providing consistent messages to both boys and girls, especially considering the pressures placed on young people by their peers.

"Parents don't know how to start talking to their kids about sex. Sometimes they're embarrassed or they don't know what to say, and they're wondering if the message they're delivering will be the right message," McLeod said.

One of the best opportunities to talk to your children about uncomfortable topics is in the car, she said. There, your children are a captive audience, but they don't have to look you in the face. She and Brooke discuss examples from their own parenting experiences and stress the importance of maintaining parent-child boundaries.

"Right now, you need to be the parent and be in charge. Sometimes your kids won't like it, but that's OK. There will be plenty of time to be their friend when they're adults."

While the program is abstinence-based, McLeod and Brooke also are realistic. They say that it's important to provide medically accurate information about contraception and anatomy, as well as definitions of sex and intimacy.

Families might have their own beliefs and preferences regarding pre-marital sex, but McLeod and Brooke tell parents that, ultimately, "They need to realize that the kids will be the ones to make the choice; parents need to present all options and information."

Annette Blunk, a parent of several students in the Pleasant Valley School District, has been to "Know What to Say" seminars at both the elementary and junior high schools and now will be attending the session at the high school. She said the approach is very practical, and keeps going back because the content is always changing.

"At the elementary school ... some of the parents were really embarrassed, but as you get up through junior high and the high school, the crowds increase and parents are really looking for a way to help their kids and stay in touch."

She likes the opportunity to network with other parents because they all have different experiences to share, and she also appreciates the handouts, Web links, and one-on-one discussions about basic issues such as sex, drugs and the Internet.

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS

If you can't attend "Know What to Say" on Oct. 8,

sessions also are offered at North Scott Junior High, Eldridge, on Oct. 6 and at Wood Intermediate, Davenport, on Oct. 22. All presentations are at 6:30 p.m. Organizers say new topics will be discussed from previous years.

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