

Workshops to Address 'Sexting' and Teens

Oswego County Opportunities' Health Education Program invites parents to attend an enlightening and informative workshop on the issue of sexting and teens. While sexting is not as prevalent as once thought, it is a concern and carries with it some rather serious personal and legal ramifications.

"Sexting" is defined as the sending of sexually explicit photos, images, text messages, or e-mails by using a cell phone or other mobile device.

In an effort to help parents better understand the issue, OCO's Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (CAPP) program and Youth 4 Youth program have collaborated to present a workshop titled, "Sexting and Your Teen...What Parents Need to Know." The first of its kind in Oswego County, the Sexting and Your Teen workshop will help make parents more aware of teen sexting and how to talk to their teens about it.

"As the internet, cell phones, and other technologies continue to advance there are many ways in which teens may use this technology inappropriately. Many teens do not realize the repercussions of actions such as sexting. In addition to the personal and emotional consequences there may be legal consequences as well," said Shannon Endsley, senior health educator with OCO's CAPP program.

Topics to be addressed during the workshop include: Why teens choose to sext, the consequences of sexting, and the positive aspects of properly using today's technology. Additionally, the workshop will feature presentations from the Oswego County Sheriff's Department on sexting laws in New York State and legal consequences of sexting, and a presentation by Sarah Stevens, an educator in OCO's Services to Aid Families program (SAF), on the use of technology as it relates to sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

"According to the Bureau of Justice Special Report on Intimate Partner Violence, 1 in 3 teens is abused in a relationship," said Stevens. "With this powerful statistic in mind, we will discuss the risks technology creates for violence in relationships and provide information on identifying behaviors of an abusing partner as well as reducing risk factors associated with dating violence and sexual assault. It is extremely important for parents to understand available resources within our community for reducing risk factors and responding to teen dating violence. Knowledge is power."

To accommodate parents throughout Oswego County, OCO will offer the workshop at four different dates and locations:

- January 12, 6:00 p.m. at Rural Migrant Ministries, 15 Stewart Street in Richland.
- January 18, 6:00 p.m. at OCO's Midtown Plaza Office, 75 East First Street in Oswego.
- January 24, 6:00 p.m. at OCO's Main Office, 239 Oneida Street in Fulton.
- January 30, 6:00 p.m. at Paul V. Moore High School, 44 School Drive in Central Square.

The workshops are open to all parents. Teens are also welcome to attend. Endsley added that the workshops will also provide parents with interactive activities to make the workshop fun as well as informative.

Sexting and Your Teen...What Parents Need to Know is just one of several workshops that OCO's Health Education program has planned. Future workshops will focus on talking to young children, talking to children about puberty, creating sexually responsible teens, and other pertinent topics regarding healthy relationships between parents and youth.

"We are excited to be able to provide a platform for parents to ask questions of a trained domestic violence/rape crisis advocate with the goal of giving both parents and teens the opportunity to gain accurate information and resources on teen dating violence. We want parents to leave the workshop with a heightened awareness of the seriousness of teen dating violence as well as a set of tangible skills for effectively interacting with their children in discussions about this difficult issue," said Stevens.

"One of the goals of the CAPP program is to increase youth knowledge of healthy sexual behaviors and reduce the practice of risky sexual behaviors," added Endsley. "There is much to learn at the Sexting and Your Teen workshop. It is an informative workshop that empowers parents and ensures that parents are their children's first sexuality educator," said Endsley.

For more information on the Sexting and Your Teen workshop contact Shannon Endsley at 315-592-0819, or visit the OCO Health Education page on Facebook.

One of Oswego County's largest employers, OCO provides more than 50 human service programs that touch the lives of over 30,000 county residents each year. OCO's mission is to build partnerships that improve the quality of life and create successful communities. Visit OCO on the web at www.oco.org. Oswego County Opportunities is a member agency of the United Way of Greater Oswego County.