

Katz brings message of drugs to city parents

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NORWALK -- She usually tells the story to children: That of the well-liked boy who earned his black belt in grade school, played sports in high school and took honors courses at the University of Hartford before overdosing heroin at the age of 20.

This month, however, Ginger Katz will bring the story of her son, Ian, to adults throughout Fairfield County with a drug prevention seminar called Courageous Parenting 101.

"Even if you think your children will never do drugs, you have to learn about everything they're going to be exposed to," said Katz, founder of the Courage to Speak Foundation.

Seminars are free and public, scheduled for Oct. 20, Oct. 27 and Nov. 3 at West Rocks Middle School. They will run from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Light dinner and child care will be provided, as well. Registration is encouraged.

"They will get phenomenal, up-to-date information to arm themselves," said social worker Dawn Roy, one of the instructors. "Part of the struggle today is staying two steps ahead of your children."

Another instructor, Millie Seguinot, will interpret the material into Spanish.

The foundation hopes to spare parents the anguish that Katz has endured since 1996, when Ian died. He was planning to enter rehab the next morning.

"I never had a course like this," Katz said.

Since the parenting seminar was introduced in 2008, the foundation has trained nearly 80 instructors -- executive directors for youth agencies, school counselors, healthcare professionals.

The program has grown to include 12 offerings throughout Connecticut this year.

"It's not just about drug prevention, but about parents getting their children through challenging times," Katz said. "Pills, alcohol, drugs. Without exclusion, it's out there. Parents are the key to helping children make good decisions."

A recent study by the Yale University School of Medicine shows that parents benefit from the course, as well.

Areas of improvement were communication with children about drugs, knowledge of children's social lives and confidence to intervene and prevent children from using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

"We focus on the home, the school and the community to address drug prevention," said Carol Troy, program director for the Courage to Speak Foundation.