

Strengthening your family's muscles

For many of us, the New Year is motivation to start fresh. All the post-holiday ads are boasting a new you: time to go on a healthy diet, exercise, join a gym.

So why not exercise some other muscles? This is a good time of year to think about strengthening parenting skills. Studies show that when parents and caregivers set clear guidelines and expectations, along with healthy doses of emotional support, youth are less likely to engage in risky behaviors - including drinking. It sounds simple, but it's definitely not easy. Even if yours is a strong, supportive family, this program offers a chance for a tune-up, connecting with other parents and local support.

It takes nearly a month to embed new behavior; it really doesn't matter whether you're trying to eat better, exercise or improve your mindset. Thirty days. Creating new habits and being open to change is never easy.

But there are local FREE resources that can help parents and youth launch 2011 with new or refreshed skills.

The Strengthening Family Program is offered throughout Lorain County through various agencies. Again, it's all FREE.

Providers include:

- Catholic Charities Community Services Lorain County; 440-366-1106 ext. 18.
- LCADA (Lorain County Alcohol and Drug Abuse



Services); 440-282-4777.

- UMADAOP (Urban Minority Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Outreach Program); 440-246-4616.

The Strengthening Families Program is usually a seven-week program for parents/caregivers and youth from ages 5-10 and 11-17. It offers a free family meal and session for parents/caregivers to learn about setting rules, holding family meetings, encouraging youth. At the same time, youth learn about peer resistance skills, family meetings and goal setting. The program focuses on showing love and setting limits.

The programs are held at various county locations; some are held at churches, schools, agencies. In just

2.5 hours, you can give your family a booster shot of encouragement, new ideas and support for the hardest job you'll ever have to do - parenting your kids.

The program is shown to have an impact on improving family relationships. It's been in the county since 2005, shortly after Communities That Care of Lorain County conducted a youth survey. The coalition, working to prevent and reduce underage substance abuse, found Strengthening Families could help decrease risky behaviors among youth while increasing ways to buffer them from problems. Local parents and youth who have completed the program say it's helped them learn new skills, including ways to reconnect as a family

and have fun together.

Devoting a small amount of time - about the time it takes to watch a movie - can have lasting impact. Did you know that one of the simplest ways to make a positive impact on youth is simply sitting down to dinner together? Strengthening Families provides a FREE family meal to help you get into the routine. That's just one of the great habits you can build on through this program.

Starting this Friday, January 7, from 5-7:30 p.m., the Strengthening Families Program will be held at the Child Care Resource Center, 5350 Oberlin Ave., in Lorain. This offering will run every Friday through February 18. It's a great way to get through the winter doldrums. For information on the program starting at the end of this week, contact Marianne Pierro at the Child Care Resource Center: 440-960-7187, ext. 234.

You can find out about more Strengthening Families Programs being offered throughout the county by contacting any of the three agencies listed above. Oh, and in case we forgot: it's FREE.

For more information on the Strengthening Families Program, and other ways to keep families and youth healthy and safe, check out Communities That Care of Lorain County at www.ctcloraincounty.org call 440-282-9920 or e-mail cgabe@lorainadas.org.