

Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

Bones, Vaping, and Teen Conversations

Summary

Medical assistants in a busy orthopedic practice saw potential for preventing youth nicotine addiction by participating in an Adult Advisor Sidekicks training.

Need

According to the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), 45% of high school students and 16% of middle school students have used e-cigarettes, a significant increase since 2015. Unfortunately, two Waldo County Orthopedic medical assistants knew vaping rates were high from working with youth. Already versed in addressing tobacco and vaping use, these professionals wanted to provide preventive measures and explore effective ways to engage teens in having helpful conversations with their peers.



Intervention

Sidekicks, a program helping Maine youth talk with peers about tobacco use and vaping, looked like a good way to build the skills they wanted. These medical assistants learned about Sidekicks through the Center for Tobacco Independence (CTI), and CTI alerted the Waldo County District Tobacco Prevention Partner (DTPP) of their interest. A connection between the DTPP and the medical assistants was made and an Adult Advisor Sidekicks training was completed. When teens come in for treatment of fractures they are seen about four times, giving the medical assistants time to engage in tobacco use conversations and opportunities to check back in with the teens.



"We know that teens are more receptive to hearing messages from their peers rather than the preaching or nagging of adults. Sidekicks gave me an opportunity to build and practice the skill of keeping a partnership conversation going." – Leanne Temple, CMA III



Results

Rather than telling teens what is bad about vaping the medical assistants learned to engage teens by asking open ended questions like "What do you know about vaping?" and piquing teen curiosity by asking, "Could you help us?" Sidekicks teaches to ask permission before sharing and the medical assistants model this skill by asking, "Can I tell you something you might not know about vape pods?" When a teen is engaged they add, "What do your friends think about vaping?". As a conversation develops they ask, "How would it be for you to have a conversation about vaping with a friend?" and suggest an opening they might use, such as "Can I tell you something I learned at the doctor's office?". On the next visit the medical assistants ask, "How did it go talking about vaping with your friend?". If the teen didn't discuss vaping, they ask an open ended question like, "What might make talking about vaping easier?".

Sustainability

In March 2020 the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute met with 28 national experts to discuss the gaps, barriers, and opportunities related to prevention and cessation of e-cigarette use in youth. One identified opportunity was to develop and test e-cigarette prevention interventions for adolescents and young adults in non-school settings (e.g., community-based settings, medical settings, and workplace). Medical professionals could positively influence teen behavior with tobacco through ongoing, skillful conversations.

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