

# Local News | Marin project aims to curb youth substance abuse

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Marin parents who worry their children are at risk for substance abuse have a new set of online and printed tools to help.

“[Let’s Talk](#)” is the name of the project by a coalition of five Marin health, education and youth organizations. It offers booklets in English and Spanish for high school and middle school families; a series of six free monthly parent discussion groups starting Oct. 6; and local and national resources to get more support.

The tools are available through a website, [LetsTalkMarin.org](https://LetsTalkMarin.org). In addition, copies of the “Let’s Talk” booklet are being distributed to all Marin parents of sixth-grade students. A version for high school students is being given to families with ninth-graders.

“This is an effort to reduce the number of parents who are caught off guard by the social pressures their kids will face,” said Kathy Koblick, director of the public health division of the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services, one of the five agencies working on the project.

“The better informed parents are about the latest trends and the substances out there, the better they can help their children navigate these waters,” Koblick said.

[Tori Kropp](#), a Marin resident whose 19-year-old son Xander died last year from an overdose of a fentanyl-laced opioid drug, is one of several grieving parents who contributed writings to the project in hopes they will alert other families that the threat is real.

“I couldn’t stop the train my Xander found himself on, but if one young life can be changed, then his legacy is worth everything,” Kropp writes in the high school “Let’s Talk” booklet.

Lisa Hunt, the mother of Marin 10th grader Shayne Rebbetoy, said her son died after experimenting with hallucinogenic mushrooms.

“Shayne was a bright, loving and joy-filled teen who sought out adventure and fun,” Hunt writes in the high school booklet. “He had a huge smile and loved to laugh. We miss him so.”

According to data from 2017 to 2019 in the annual California Healthy Kids Survey, 49% of Marin’s 11th graders reported they used alcohol or drugs in the past 30 days — more than double the statewide average of 23%.

“When I was in middle school, I experienced the struggles and challenges that middle school kids go through on a daily basis, as described in the booklet,” Annika Danne, a Redwood High School junior, said of the “Let’s Talk” booklet for the families of sixth graders.

“Therefore, I understand how important parents are during this time of our adolescence,” Danne added. “I advise them to connect with their teens and realistically discuss the new and possibly scary situations their children encounter as middle schoolers.”

Besides the Marin County Health and Human Services Department, other agencies involved in the project include the Marin County Office of Education, RxSafe Marin, the Marin Prevention Network and Marin Healthy Youth Partnerships. The Ross Valley School District helped with the sixth-grade booklet.

“We know that all of our children need guidance, support and encouragement that will help them make healthy and positive choices,” said Mary Jane Burke, the Marin County superintendent of schools. “And we know that families need resources to support their children — especially those experiencing social-emotional challenges.”