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RIVERDALE - Smokers are jokers for fifth graders

(by Leslie Scott - Staff Writer - February 18, 2009)

RIVERDALE — Fifth graders were given some useful advice on how to say no when they are pressured to smoke their first cigarette.

Several students in the Pompton Lakes High School's Peer Leadership Club stopped by the Riverdale School on Feb. 10 to have a group discussion with the students about the issue that they will inevitably face.

This club also runs the eighth grade orientation. High School Physical Education Instructor Eileen Allan said, "And then from September to January, once a month, they meet with freshman groups to go over problems that they may be having in high school."

The Club stops by all of the elementary schools in Riverdale and Pompton Lakes to talk with fifth graders about smoking.

"This is an age where they found out statistically, most of the kids would try [to smoke] was at least fifth grade," said Eileen.

While at the Riverdale School, the high school students first put on a brief skit. This skit showed one person asking a friend to smoke and they showed all thoughts that would go through that person's mind as they make that final decision.

These thoughts tell them to say no and yes. The no voice would tell them not to because their teeth would become yellow and their hair would smell from the smoke. The yes voice would explain to them that they could always brush their teeth and shampoo their hair so it's ok to smoke.

After the end of the skit Eileen told the young students that she hopes the good angel stays in their mind when a friend asks them to smoke.

"Sometimes once you get started it's very hard to kick that habit," Eileen said to the students.

Club member, Willie Allan said he believes what they do does help.

"At this age they are not exactly ready to start smoking yet, but it is a good age to give them the warnings. They are at this age when you can tell them about the dangers and they'll understand," said Willie.

In addition to this seminar the fifth graders are also asked to interview someone who smokes and find out things like what it was like when they first started and how much they spend on the habit.

The fifth graders are also given literature on the negative side effects of smoking, all the bad ingredients found in cigarettes and a list of reasons why they should say no.

"You'd be surprised some spent \$300 per month and I tell kids, if they are boys, how many video games that could buy and, if they are girls, how many outfits they can get," said Eileen.

This club also supports other antismoking campaigns at the High School. This past November the High School participated in the Great American Smoke Out and in March a Kick Butts Day will be held.

School Superintendent, Betty Ann Wyks said this antismoking program is part of the DARE program.

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