

**Shrewsbury Coalition for Addiction Prevention and Education (SCAPE) &  
Shrewsbury Youth & Family Services (SYFS) Joint Press Release**

For Immediate Release

Contact: Christine Mowry, 978-808-4592 [cmowry@syfs-ma.org](mailto:cmowry@syfs-ma.org)

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**Middle Schoolers at Risk: What Every Family Needs to Know  
*Forum to hear from experts on topics such as vaping, social media,  
gaming, marijuana, and how to talk to your kids.***

Shrewsbury, MA – On Tuesday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, at 7pm at Oak Middle School in the auditorium, an important community awareness forum will be sponsored by Shrewsbury Coalition for Addiction Prevention and Education (SCAPE) and Shrewsbury Youth & Family Services (SYFS), for families to hear from experts on topics such as vaping, social media, gaming, marijuana and how to talk to your kids about these important issues.

This is an opportunity for middle-school parents and all community members to learn from experts the challenges and pressures that middle schoolers face in regard to substances and other potentially addictive behaviors and how to detect if your child is at-risk or exhibiting signs of use and/or addiction.

Dr. Ann Jones, Principal of Oak Middle School, remarked “Middle schoolers today are exposed to risks unlike those we ever experienced as kids. Parents need to know what these are and how they can keep their child safe now, before they enter high school. I urge you to attend this program!”

This November 13<sup>th</sup> event will also feature **from 6pm to 7pm** the exhibit “**Hidden in Plain Sight**” which shows parents what today’s substance use paraphernalia, including Juul products, looks like and challenges them to see if they would be able to identify where it may be hidden in the child’s bedroom. The exhibit recreates a teenager's bedroom and is designed to raise awareness about the possibility of substance abuse. The mock bedroom is intended to teach parents about the indicators, which are often "hidden in plain sight," that their son or daughter might be using drugs. Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services will also be available to answer questions and provide resources.

From **7:00pm – 8:15pm** Representative Hannah Kane, a member of the SCAPE, will moderate a panel discussion with presentations by the speakers listed below and from **8:15pm – 9pm** the panel will take questions from the audience.

**Jennifer Rifkin, Clinical Director of Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services**

Mental Health Challenges are increasingly prevalent among adolescents. In fact, 1 in 5 teens will experience a mental illness and 50% of those illnesses have an onset by the age of 14.

Jennifer Rifkin will discuss the early signs and symptoms of mental health challenges in youth and how to decipher normal teen behavior from a potential mental health issue.

**Mark Joyce, LMHC, Spectrum Health**

Concerned about your child using, or being exposed to substances? Mark will present information on youth substance use and substance use disorders and how they co-occur with mental health issues.

**Tina Grosowsky, UMASS Department of Psychiatry Tobacco Free Community Partnership**

The vaping epidemic is a critical issue among middle and high school students and big tobacco is specifically targeting our children. Tina will discuss programs and policies, and provide tobacco prevention and smoking/vaping cessation resources.

**Robert Hackenson, Dynamic Influence – Technology and Social Media Landmines**

Robert will briefly be addressing some of the “Technology & Social Media Land Mines” that you as a parent need to know about. With the rise of smart phones, social media, gaming, etc., there are certain dangers you and your kids might not see coming until it’s too late. This presentation will briefly discuss some of these potential issues from social media anxiety and technology addiction, to cyber bullying, cyber predators, and your digital footprint. Robert will then provide you with some of the tricks and tools to help your child navigate around these potential dangers.

**Cassandra Anderson, Worcester Department of Public Health**

Cassandra joins the panel to review the 2017 Regional Youth Health Survey (RYHS) data for Oak Middle School. The RYHS is administered to OMS and SHS students approximately every 2 years and includes topics such as substance use, violence and safety, dietary behavior, mental health and sexual health. Shrewsbury specific results will be shared.

Christine Mowry, Executive Director of SYFS states “As parents, you want what’s best for your children. You may have concerns about certain behaviors they exhibit and questions about when to get help. It is important to be aware of the warning signs when your child may be struggling. When armed with this education, you can play a critical role in your children’s decision making and how to know when your child may need help. Teens who may be struggling with a mental health issue are more likely to use substances if those mental health needs aren’t identified and addressed and teens are much less likely to use substances if they have learned about the risks from their parents. We strongly encourage ALL parents to attend this informational session. Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services is available to answer questions and provide support to students and families experiencing these issues.”

The Shrewsbury Coalition for Addiction Prevention and Education (SCAPE) is comprised of a wide representation of the community joining forces to help reduce substance abuse and its consequences and impact among youth and adults in Shrewsbury. The Coalition consists of representation from youth, parents, business, law enforcement, school and public service officials, community leaders, health care professionals, faith-based organizations, media, state and local government agencies, social service providers and

other community representatives working collaboratively to identify and implement community-wide strategies to address issues concerning addiction prevention and education. SCAPE has previously held a community awareness forum on the Opioid Epidemic in April 2016, a screening of the film "If Only" produced by James Wahlberg of the Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation in October 2016 and a presentation in November of 2017 by Dr. Ruth Potee on adolescent brain development and its impact on teen risk taking, including alcohol and substance abuse.

Shrewsbury Youth & Family Services, Inc. (SYFS) is our community's only private, non-profit counseling and social services agency, providing a diverse offering of programs and services that help to strengthen and support youth and families.

For more information please contact Christine Mowry of Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services at 508-845-6932 ext. 306 or [cmowry@syfs-ma.org](mailto:cmowry@syfs-ma.org).

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