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Teens need our help BY WANDA BOONE

If you have teens, think back to when they were babies just starting to crawl. You created and monitored the environment to help ensure their safety, health and well being.

Teens are not small adults. Their internal organs are not fully formed. The frontal lobes of their brains are still developing. Many times we scratch our heads and think, "It seems like they would know better than to ..." But they don't know better. They are children. Teens need our guidance, example, and protection. We have to monitor the environment and help ensure their safety, health and wellbeing.

"Prescription drug abuse is a silent epidemic that is stealing thousands of lives and tearing apart communities and families across America," Gil Kerlikowske, director of National Drug Control Policy, said in a CDC news release. "Parents and grandparents should properly dispose of any unneeded or expired medications from the home and to talk to their kids about the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs."

Prescription and illegal drugs caused 36,450 deaths in 2008, compared with 39,973 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, according to the Associated Press. According to the CDC, enough painkillers were prescribed in 2010 to medicate every American adult around the clock for a month. Nearly one in five teens report abusing prescription drugs to get high (Partnership for a Drug-Free America, 2006).

One third of all new abusers of prescription drugs in 2006 were 12 to 17 years old (SAMHSA, 2008).

Nearly half of teens who have abused prescription painkillers also report the use of two or more other drugs, most commonly alcohol and marijuana (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2007). In Durham, 17.1 percent of high school students surveyed had taken a prescription drug (such as OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Adderall, Ritalin, or Xanax) without a doctor's prescription one or more times during their life. (YRBS Survey 2009)

Where do teenagers get prescription drugs?

More than 60 percent of teenagers say prescription pain relievers are easy to get from the medicine cabinet at home. More than half say prescription pain relievers are "available everywhere" (Partnership for a Drug-Free America, 2006). "Skittles" parties are becoming popular among teens where pills are dumped in a bowl and ingested to get high.

Bands Against Destructive Decisions (BADD!) is the youth coalition of Durham Together for Resilient Youth (TRY). BADD team leaders receive instruction on the dangers of substance abuse (tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs), the influence of media, the link between risky behaviors and substance abuse, become advocates for policy change and take action.

Team leaders representing all Durham districts are collecting pledges from parents and adults that document their commitment to lock up and monitor their prescription drugs and alcohol. Parents also meet informally to talk about strategies to help navigate through the teen years.

To take the pledge, join or learn more send an email to DurhamNCTRY@aol.com, visit DurhamTRY.org or Together for Resilient Youth, on Facebook.