



## "Let's Talk": Educators Excited about New Approach for OH Kids at Risk

Written by: Mary Kuhlman, August 27, 2015

COLUMBUS, Ohio - One-in-four Ohio high school students admit to binge drinking, according to the Office of Adolescent Health, and a new strategy debuting in some Ohio schools is opening the door to conversations about drugs and alcohol with students.

The SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment) is a series of questions asked primarily in medical settings, and last year Norwood City Schools used it during scoliosis and health screenings.

Deb Robison, Supervisor, Family and Student Services with the Norwood School District, says about 30 percent of their middle and high school students were experimenting with alcohol regularly, but they were having trouble reaching them.

"We have a drug and alcohol counselor that works with us but we were getting one or two referrals a year," she says. "So we were really motivated to try to find who these kids were prior to them getting in so deep we couldn't have any connection with them."

The early and brief intervention, added to other health screenings, can be helpful to a young person who has started experimenting with drugs or alcohol but is not addicted. Robison says the conversation allows the student strategize ways to avoid risky substances.

Through the SBIRT, Norwood discovered about five percent of kids screened needed referrals for treatment.

While not all kids are forthcoming during screening, Robison says the open dialogue builds relationships and trust.

"One student came back about two or three weeks later and said 'I wasn't really honest. I do use and I really feel like I need help,'" she says. "So we were able to get that student connected to the right treatment services to get him on his way to get some help."

To help promote SBIRT, UHCAN Ohio created the "Somebody Finally Asked Me!" campaign to link education professionals to training resources. Robison encourages other districts to get involved.

"It's a fairly quick and easy and painless kind of thing to do as long as folks are prepared to do it and prepared to handle the results," she says. "The kids that come and then do show some kind of indication that they do need some help."



One-in-four Ohio teens admit to binge drinking; health leaders say SBIRT can help. Credit: incase/Flickr

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SBIRT got off the ground in Norwood funded by a grant and partnerships with the local health department, school board and drug and alcohol prevention organizations.