MEDICINE SAFETY CAN SAVE KIDS' LIVES NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

In light of the opioid epidemic and with fentanyl already in our communities, it's more important than ever to teach our kids about medication safety. By being proactive now, we can directly reduce the number of accidental poisonings and lay a foundation to protect our kids into their future.

It's not too early to start with age-appropriate education about medicine safety. According to the Missouri Poison Center, youth can begin to self-medicate around age 11. **Below are five actionable tips and practices about medicine safety we can implement now** while our children are still young to help them make safe choices related to medicines when they grow up:

1. Teach your child that they should only take medicine from trusted adults.
Make a list of who these people are and remind them of this often.

2. Model responsible medication safety by never sharing medications or using someone else's medications.
Continually reinforce this message with your child, explaining that they should never share medication or take someone else's medication. Tell them that medicine is powerful and we should always follow the directions on the bottle.

3. Keep medications in their original containers to avoid confusion with other medicines or candy.
This is also important because each medication has its own dosage, warnings, and directions for use. One of the most common mistakes when it comes to medication is accidental double dosing.

4. Always store medicine in a safe place, such as a place only you know about or a high shelf that children can't reach.
Don't keep prescription or over the counter medicine in your bathroom medicine cabinet where anyone can find it.

5. Participate in regular safe medication disposal.
Keeping unused, unwanted, or expired medication out of the house entirely will drastically limit the risks to kids. You can find a list of our permanent local prescription drug drop boxes in the Kansas City Northland that are open year round at ParentUpKC.com.

Safe home disposal is also a great option: Remove the drugs from their original containers and mix them with something undesirable, such as used coffee grounds or cat litter. Put the mixture in a re-sealable zipper storage bag and throw in the garbage. Don't flush medicine down the toilet (it pollutes our water supply).

Research shows that starting preventative education with early elementary school-aged children reduces chronic substance use in high school, and communication is an essential part of keeping our children healthy and safe. Thank you for taking the time to have these conversations and reinforce these medication safety practices.

BEACON MENTAL HEALTH PARENT UP

Parent Up is a program of Beacon Mental Health and the Northland Coalition Prevention Network that empowers and equips KC Northland parents to care, connect, communicate, and pay careful attention to their child in order to prevent youth substance use. Get free resources and tools at ParentUpKC.com or on Facebook @ParentUp.