

## Preteens and Tobacco

Kids as young as 11 have shown up at the Volusia County Health Department for a required three-hour anti-tobacco course after being cited for an underage purchase, says Rakinya J. Hinson, the department's Health Education Program Manager. While most offenders fit into the age range of 15 to 17 because it's easier for them to access tobacco products, anti-tobacco messages should start much earlier.

Lessons taught when they are most effective, while children are still in middle school, may fall on deaf ears anyway. Hinson says youngsters care little about the eventual health effects or the impact smoking has on a budget. "They're only in the here and now," she says. "It just doesn't apply to them."



[www.deltonaFORyou.org](http://www.deltonaFORyou.org)

Following are some effective strategies for keeping your children away from tobacco:

- Monitor their associations, and ask questions. "For students, it's more of a social thing." Few will smoke while alone. Know who your children spend time with. Do you know if your child's friend has a parent who shares tobacco products with her? It happens, Hinson says.
- "Keep an open line of communication." It's good to achieve some level of comfort with your children in discussing a wide range of subjects, from friends, to hanging out, to sex – anything. "They may never come out and just ask you about smoking," Hinson says, and it's best to work the information into a normal conversation.
- Give them something to do. Boredom is a chief precursor to tobacco use.
- If you are a smoker or use other forms of tobacco, quit. "Practice what you're preaching," Hinson encourages. There's nothing you can say that will mean as much to your children as what you do.

She counsels parents to fight feelings of frustration when it seems anti-tobacco messages aren't getting through. Regardless of appearances, parents are the biggest influencers on their children's behavior. In her work, Hinson faces this same frustration on a regular basis but believes she is planting the seeds for future positive behaviors.

By the time students enter the health department's Tobacco Prevention Program, smoking, snuff or chewing tobacco already may be an entrenched habit. While in the three-hour course, one 17-year-old, who had been smoking for seven years, found he had spent enough on cigarettes to get a truck he had wanted. Another calculated he had spent \$3,000 over the course of one summer on tobacco products.

Strong forces encourage this kind of spending. The tobacco industry views teenagers as replacement smokers and markets products with powerful appeal, such as candy-flavored tobaccos. Try as you might to keep children from starting to smoke, chew or dip, you still may be put in the position of trying to help them quit. Whatever your situation, assistance is out there.

## Local Resources

- **Volusia County Health Department**  
386-274-0500 X601, [www.volusiahealth.com](http://www.volusiahealth.com)  
The Health Department offers a comprehensive approach to tobacco prevention, including smoking prevention, cessation and educational programs offered to schools and any youth-serving agency (elementary through high school). Brochure topics range from "Smoking: Five Best Reasons To Never Start" to "A Teen's Guide To Quitting Smoking" and "Help Your Teen Quit Smoking: A Guide for Parents."
- **American Lung Association in Florida, Daytona Beach**  
(386) 255-6447, [www.lungfla.org](http://www.lungfla.org)  
For more information, press the "Stop Smoking" tab.

## For more help, go to:

- <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/tobacco/SWAT.html>  
Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) is Florida's statewide youth organization working to mobilize, educate and equip Florida youth to revolt against and de-glamorize Big Tobacco, and it's active at 12 schools in Volusia County, including Galaxy Middle and Deltona Middle in Deltona.
- <http://floridaquitline.com>  
You can find the Florida Quitline online or by calling 1-877-U CAN NOW (877-822-6669). The service provides free phone or in-person counseling and nicotine replacement therapy.