

MASK: A Mother's Solution

Written by Written by Caroline Austerman

The problems that we thought only affected teens are reaching younger and younger children each day. Mother's Awareness on School-Age Kids is helping us understand such issues and teaching us how to deal with them, face to face.



Mother's awareness on school-age kids (MASK) is a nonprofit organization aimed at educating both parents and children about the many dangerous issues that kids encounter on a daily basis. MASK attempts to create a dialogue between children and parents on topics that the media and Hollywood glamorize, like alcohol, drugs and smoking, and strives to help today's youth make healthy and safe decisions that will have a positive impact on their future.

MASK was founded in 2007 by Kimberly Cabral, a local mother who was concerned about her children's well-being at school. "I was a stay-at-home mom," Cabral says. "At that time, my oldest was in sixth grade. I was always at the point [when I was wondering], 'When do I start talking about sex with him?' For about an hour and a half, he told me what the kids were doing—I sat back and freaked out." After talking further to her children, she realized that there was a strong need to educate both kids and parents on other important subjects like drug trends, alcohol abuse, Internet safety, eating disorders, relationships, depression and cyber-bullying. She realized these negative situations are affecting young children, not just teens. Her goal with MASK is to create communication between adults and children, as well as teach youngsters how to make the right decisions, even when experiencing peer pressure.

The various MASK events held throughout the year allow mothers to share tools that focus on prevention. MASK offers monthly meetings (see Web site for times and locations), exposing mothers and children to important and relevant topics through the use of guest speakers who specialize in that topic. In addition, there are also fundraising events, like the MASKer Aide Night Gala that was held in the fall, which took place at Cabral's home and featured partygoers in masquerade-themed masks, which were decorated by the kids. Because the organization is all about the children, MASK invites them to participate in a majority of the activities. Luncheons are held for both parents and children to meet and mingle with one another. Unique guests attend the luncheons to entertain the kids. For instance, the Phoenix Suns gorilla and Centre Stage Dance Studio surprised guests last year.

Another major part of MASK is having kids build relationships with each other and contribute to their community through events like car washes and change drives, which raise money for charities throughout Arizona. "Not only do kids get to hear the information, but they get to be in situations that benefit them," Cabral says. "It's about connecting the kids with other kids."

For one of the organization's most recent projects, MASK partnered with Attorney General Terry Goddard's office to promote awareness about Internet safety. The Attorney General's Office trained MASK to be part of the ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children) Task Force. MASK has also partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Scottsdale, the Scottsdale Police Department and the Paradise Valley School District. Plus, MASK plans on expanding the program to other school districts in the Valley in the hopes of reaching as many families as possible in this grassroots effort to educate. Cabral adds, "We are passionate moms, and we are aligning ourselves with the best information out there."

For more information visit www.azmask.org.