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## Picture books, quizzes and skits: How she is helping parents talk to their children about drugs

Conversations should start early, says A3 Network volunteer, who believes open communication is key in drug prevention education



As a volunteer with the Anti-Drug Abuse Advocacy Network, Ms Tan Sze Wei wants to offer her time to raise awareness of the consequences of drug abuse and deter the younger generation from venturing into drugs. PHOTO: MS TAN SZE WEI

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A close friend's fallout from drugs left such a striking impression on Ms Tan Sze Wei that it motivated her to want to play a part in deterring drug use.

"He shared that because of his abuse of methamphetamine and heroin, he was incarcerated for about five years. Till today, he lives with the regret of being an absent father who missed out on his children's growing up years. The anguish he felt while thinking back on how one wrong choice cost him family time really stuck with me," the civil servant recalls.

She adds: "I have also heard about the difficult challenges drug offenders go through to rebuild their lives and recover from addiction."



Of drug abuse and deter more people, especially the younger generation, from venturing into drugs, Ms Tan decided to sign up with the Anti-Drug Abuse Advocacy Network (A3 Network).

The A3 Network, a volunteer initiative jointly set up by the National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA) and Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB), aims to develop a network of active individuals who identify with, support, and promote the anti-drug cause, and generate community awareness and involvement for anti-drug related activities. It also equips and empowers advocates to spread anti-drug messages among their networks through their own self-initiated activities.

### Helping to start important conversations



Ms Tan reiterates anti-drug messages to her nine-year-old son when they spend time together reading the PDE storybooks, and engages him through hypothetical situations where he is offered drugs by friends and what he could do to say no. PHOTO: MS TAN SZE WEI

Through the A3 Network, Ms Tan has been involved in initiatives that facilitate and encourage open and honest anti-drug conversations between parents and their children. As a mother to a nine-year-old boy, she strongly believes that open communication between parents and children is key in Preventive Drug Education (PDE).

“As parents and role models to our children, we should start these conversations as early as possible,” she says, and that’s why she focuses much of her efforts on trying to help and influence those who may be tempted, before they fall into the rabbit hole of drug addiction.

“The earlier they are aware of the harmful effects of drugs, the more they would likely be able to refuse drugs if they are offered.”

As part of her volunteering efforts with the A3 Network, Ms Tan has helped to organise a PDE skit for children at the Nee Soon East community club under the Kidsread programme in collaboration with the National Library Board. The PDE skit is an anti-drug talk that provides parents with information on drug trends and drug legalisation, and even conducted anti-drug quizzes and giveaways on her social media account.

She also leveraged a community library that she had earlier set up within her HDB block to put together an anti-drug-themed display that featured various PDE storybooks and collaterals.



Ms Tan says the community library initiative was a hit among her neighbours, especially among children who enjoyed the fictional characters and engaging storylines in the books.

“More importantly, it also gave parents the tools to broach the topic on drugs,” she says. “Some parents said the materials helped them better understand the different

says. "Some parents said the materials helped them better understand the different types of drugs, and the signs and symptoms of drug abuse they should look out for."

## How to take the first step

Even when armed with the relevant materials, parents might not always know how to broach sensitive topics like drug abuse with their children, especially if they are older and are likely to have already come across mentions of drug use from friends or the media.

On this front, Ms Tan encourages parents to help nurture their children's interests in healthy habits, such as in sports and the arts. She also stresses the importance of being empathetic, especially if their children are facing difficulties in life and school.

"I recommend sharing with them how everyone faces stress in life, and that there are healthy coping methods available to them – whether it's through exercise or doing something they enjoy. Remind them that they should feel safe to seek help from their loved ones."

With her own son, Ms Tan reiterates anti-drug messages when they spend time together reading the PDE storybooks. She engages him through hypothetical situations where he is offered drugs by friends and what he could do to say no.

She adds: "He is at the age where he is developing an interest in sports, so I also remind him how becoming addicted to drugs would impact his health and life."

The A3 Network's volunteering activities have also provided a great bonding opportunity for the both of them. "He has a lot of fun helping me out with my prep work for the volunteering activities, be it putting together the artwork or helping to display books and posters for my community library."

There are also no commitment and fixed time requirements for adult advocates of the network, so even busy parents can join as volunteers and engage with their children positively at the same time.

Ms Tan is glad that her efforts in engaging her son have paid off. "He really enjoys the storybooks and the Augmented Reality (AR) mobile game app, Drug Buster Buddies, produced by CNB and available on both [Android](#) and [iOS](#) devices, and has even invited his friends to read the books and play the games together!"

Find out more information about the A3 volunteer network [here](#). The storybooks that Sze Wei mentioned can be found on the [CNB website](#).

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