

## Penn Hills parent organizes 'Night of Awareness' to discuss addiction



DILLON CARR | Wednesday, April 25, 2018, 3:09 p.m.



Penn Hills High School

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Denise Hoffman of Penn Hills is taking steps to help other families deal with the devastating effects of alcoholism she felt after learning her son suffered from the disease.

The retired teacher has organized a panel discussion called "Night of Awareness" at Penn Hills High School featuring a panel of experts who work with youths in the region to prevent drug and alcohol abuse.

Her son, Douglas, 31, has been sober for a year and is cheering her on.

"Drug and alcohol abuse is just a symptom. We should be talking about emotions and feelings that later lead to abuse early on," he said. "I'm so glad that this thing is happening."

Hoffman, who taught elementary school before retiring and continues to substitute teach in the Penn Hills district, said her goal for the event is to get parents and teachers talking about mental

health and other underlying issues of drug and alcohol abuse.

"I think kids need to be able to be heard because they deal with a lot of emotions. And part of the solution is early talking," she said. "We should be able to talk about emotional issues without feeling shameful."

Panelists at the Night of Awareness will each give a short presentation before the floor is opened to the audience for questions. After the q-and-a session, participants and panelists will move into the high school's cafeteria where informational tables will be set up to offer additional resources.

"We want to start our community talking so we can all be part of the solution instead of the problem," Hoffman said.

She wants others to be able to spot the signs of abuse and be ready to deal with it when it is discovered in their homes. That's something she said her own family lacked.

"We're a traditional family, you know? We ate meals together, but we never talked about drugs and alcohol because we didn't think it was a problem," she said.

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### If You Go

What: Night of Awareness panel discussion

When: 6-8:30 p.m. May 17

Where: Penn Hills High School Auditorium

Panelists: Sherry Phillips and Tim McDowell of New Freedom Recovery in Irwin; [Walter Sposkoski of Milestone Centers in Wilkinsburg](#); Betty McBride and Armintry Parks of Mon Yough Community Services in McKeesport; Dr. Mark G. Boles, volunteer at Linton Middle School educating youth on the signs of drug abuse and addiction.