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**Eric Wandersleben, Director of Media Relations & Outreach**

**614.728.5090 | [eric.wandersleben@mha.ohio.gov](mailto:eric.wandersleben@mha.ohio.gov)**

## **Holidays Present Perfect Opportunity for Families to ‘Start Talking’**

*Frequent conversations the key to preventing substance abuse, state agencies say*

COLUMBUS – Thanksgiving is a time of family gatherings, feasts and football on the television. It also marks the beginning of a holiday season that brings many opportunities for celebration, as well as stress. Alcohol and drugs can be a dangerous addition to this mix, so the season is also a perfect opportunity for Ohio families to *Start Talking!* about the dangers of substance abuse.

“Research tells us that children whose parents take a few minutes to talk to them about alcohol and other drugs are up to 50 percent less likely to use than kids who do not have these critical conversations with a trusted adult,” said Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Director Tracy Plouck. “As families gather to celebrate and give thanks this year, why not start a new tradition of taking a stand against substance abuse? We’ve made it easier than ever to get the conversation started.”

*Start Talking!* is a statewide youth drug prevention initiative championed by Gov. John Kasich and First Lady Karen W. Kasich to help families and communities prevent substance abuse before it ever starts.

The program reaches young people and their families through one of four components – Know!, Parents360Rx, 5 Minutes for Life and Building Youth Resiliency. For helpful resources and advice on how to launch the discussion, Plouck urges families to visit [StartTalking.ohio.gov](http://StartTalking.ohio.gov).

“The beauty of this program is that you don’t have to be a professional counselor to have effective conversations,” Plouck explained. “The tools are easy to use. So, whether it’s around the family dinner table, in the classroom or at a holiday gathering, *Start Talking!* provides the tools families need to have frank discussions about alcohol and other drugs.”

Parents, grandparents, teachers and other adult caregivers can subscribe to free, bi-weekly tips and TEACHable moments through the Know! campaign developed by Ohio’s Drug Free Action Alliance. More than 6,500 Ohioans have already subscribed to these messages and thousands more receive them through local community prevention coalitions, schools and provider agencies. Families may also download a free Parents360Rx toolkit and video to host a townhall-style discussion aimed at halting prescription painkiller and other drug abuse. To date, dozens of Parents360Rx events have been held across Ohio.

Meanwhile, the Ohio State Highway Patrol in partnership with the Ohio National Guard and local law enforcement officers continues to reach high school students through its *5 Minutes for Life* presentations, which encourages peer-to-peer conversations that help students to make healthy choices and stand up to any pressures to try drugs or alcohol. To date, partners have engaged more than 16,000 students.

“Curbing drug abuse in our youth is a top priority, and we urge families to open up a dialogue with children so they can understand the high risks involved,” said Colonel Paul A. Pride, Patrol Superintendent. “The conversation is well worth the time.”

Learn more at [StartTalking.Ohio.gov](http://StartTalking.Ohio.gov).

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