

Mansfield forum to focus on drug abuse

METRICH Commander Lt. Ken Coontz doesn't want people to think bath salts are the only drugs out there.

"Although it is a terrible drug, we still have other problems," he said. "Our two primary problems are still heroin and prescription medication abuse."

The emergence of bath salts has been in the news the last few months. In May, they were the primary topic at a well-attended community substance abuse forum at Lexington High School.

A similar forum called "What Parents Need to Know" will take place at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday in Mansfield Senior High School's auditorium. The event is sponsored by the Richland County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board.

"That one (May forum) was directed mostly toward bath salts," said Sherry Branham, director of program management and public relations for the mental health board. "This is a broader overview of what we've seen coming through the community."

The expert panel will include Coontz, city police crime lab director Tony Tambasco, representatives from several social service agencies and people whose family members have struggled with addiction.

"The overall goal is education and community awareness," Branham said.

Branham said those attending Tuesday's forum will learn the signs and symptoms of drug abuse and what to look for if they see a change in their children's behavior.

Branham said she hopes to see a turnout similar to the forum at Lexington High School.

"I don't care who comes," she said. "There's going to be a lot of information that parents need to know about."

Originally published in the News Journal on September 24, 2011.