

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN SAY NO TO ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

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Though illicit drugs have captured much of the media attention and that of the president one must not underestimate the problems associated with the most popular drug: alcohol. By the time children reach legal drinking age they have seen alcohol consumed 75,000 times on television. In the United States it is estimated that 4.5 million teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17 who are problem drinkers. It is estimated that one of three high school seniors will get drunk this weekend. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism indicates that alcohol is twice as popular as marijuana and 10 times as popular as cocaine among high school students. The number one killer of 15 to 24 year olds is alcohol or drug related auto accidents.

It is estimated that one of 20 high school seniors in the class of 1987 used alcohol on a daily basis, 66% had used alcohol in the month prior to the survey. Three of 100 seniors smoked marijuana on a daily basis and one of 5 had used marijuana in the prior month. Only 3 of 1000 seniors in 1987 used cocaine on a daily basis, but one in 25 had used cocaine in the previous month. Parents were frequently unaware of their use. Only 30-knew.

Alcohol and other drugs are readily available in the schools. Approximately 50% of high school students respond they can obtain alcohol or marijuana easily. 40% responded that the easiest place to obtain drugs was school. 40-66% of high school seniors stated they could obtain cocaine in 24 hours.

Children at risk for using illicit drugs tend to have used alcohol and cigarettes, have negative role models, lack self-discipline and control, expect magical solutions to their problems, have difficulty in dealing and communicating with others, and frequently display poor judgement. Adolescents develop alcohol and drug addictions quicker due to physiology and lower body weight.

There are various predictors of alcohol and drug abuse. Parental heavy alcohol consumption nearly doubles the probability of marijuana use for children (.18 vs .36). It is known that among the general population that 1 in 10 individuals will develop alcohol or drug problems among first degree relatives of individuals with such problems the incidence is 3-5 of 10.

Peer pressure has an unmistakable role. The single best predictor of marijuana abuse is abuse by the adolescents best friend (3-4X). If the parents drink heavily and the best friend smokes pot, the odds of marijuana use is 75%. Children who smoke cigarettes have twice the probability of using alcohol, 10 times the probability of abusing marijuana, and 14 the probability of using cocaine.

The consequences of these problems in adolescents are school difficulties, dropout, legal, psychiatric, and medical problems.

A handout available from the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention outlines 10 steps that parents may take to help their children say "no". These are:

1. Learning What to Say
2. Providing Guidance
3. Enhancing Self-Esteem
4. Teaching Values
5. Serving as a Role Model
6. Using Peer Pressure Skills
7. Making Family Policies
8. Preventing Experimentation
9. Joining With Others
10. Being Prepared

1. **LEARNING WHAT TO SAY** involves learning when to say it. Teenagers tend to resist lecture. Pick what is called a "teachable moment". Examples involves incidents where alcohol abuse is inappropriately portrayed on television, and responding to reports of alcohol or substance abuse by your child's peers.

2. **PROVIDING GUIDANCE AND COMMUNICATING** are actually part of learning what to say. Rephrase your children's comments so that you demonstrate your understanding. Watch both your body language and that of your child's. Give nonverbal support and encouragement. Use the right tone, avoid sarcasm. Encourage your child to elaborate his responses.

3. **ENHANCING SELF ESTEEM** involves giving lots of praise and encouragement for effort as well as success. Help set realistic goals. When correcting problems criticize the behavior, not the child as a person. Give the child real responsibility. Show your child you love them.

4. **TEACHING VALUES** involves explicitly stating your personal or religious values rejecting excessive alcohol use or any illicit drug use. Emphasize freedom and responsibility as closely related, promote respect of the human body through being health conscious, value the importance of being in control of your behavior.

5. **SERVING AS A ROLE MODEL** involves your own alcohol and drug related behavior. Most adolescents resemble their parents in their habits. Have parties which are not primarily alcohol

related, offer guests non-alcoholic beverages, never push drinks on guests, don't let alcohol impaired individuals drive. If alcoholism or substance abuse is a problem in the home, don't hide, help children understand it is a disease, Make sure children don't feel responsible for the problem. Get help.

6. USE PEER PRESSURE SKILLS involves teaching your child to value his or her individuality, exploring the definition and meaning of what a friend is, tell your child to say no and back them up when necessary, install confidence by knowing the facts, and using peer pressure in a positive way through anti-drug or alcohol student groups.

7. SETTING FAMILY POLICIES: Contrary to popular opinion children both need and want appropriate limits and rules. Discuss your expectations regarding your child's conduct beforehand, explain the consequences, and be prepared to follow through. For example parents can state that children may expect to wait an extra year before getting their license if they are caught messing with alcohol or drugs.

8. PREVENTING EXPERIMENTATION involves preventing boredom by encouraging creative activities and recreation.

9. JOINING WITH OTHERS: involves being involved in the community by attending parent teacher meetings, being aware of the problem in school, joining with other concerned parents.

10. BEING PREPARED is knowing what to do, and being alert for missing cigarettes, watered down liquor, eye drops, sleeping at inappropriate times, erratic mood swings, changes in peer groups, dropping out of previously enjoyed activities, coming into sudden wealth. If you find your child has a problem, don't accept a "promise to stop", get help.