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## Suggestions For Parents

Sometimes parents tend to react before they think things through, when it comes to their children. If they feel a set of friends are not who their children should be around they forbid them to ever hang with them again without coming up with the best solution. Sometimes telling an adolescent that they cannot see a certain group of friends leads to rebellion or loss of communication between the parent and child, which is never good. Here is some advice for parents dealing with children with friends that they think are bad influences.

- **Get to know the friends of your teen.** Learn their names, invite them into your home so you can talk and listen to them, and introduce yourself to their parents.
- **Do not attack your child's friends.** Remember that criticizing your teen's choice of friends is like a personal attack.
- **Keep the lines of communication open** and find out why these friends are important to your teenager.
- **Talk to your teenager about behavior and choices – not the friends.** If you believe your concerns are serious.
- **Encourage your teen's independence** by supporting decision-making based on principles and not other people.
- **Let your teen know of your concerns and feelings.**
- **Remember that we all learn valuable lessons from mistakes.**

Research shows that the main reason that kids don't use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs is because of their parents – because of their positive influence and because they know it would disappoint them. That's why it is so important that parents build a strong relationship with their kids and talk to them about substance abuse – the earlier the better!

### **Establish and maintain good communication with your children.**

Why? The better you know your children, the easier it will be to guide them towards positive activities and friendships.

How?

- Talk to your children every day. Share what happened to you and ask what happened to them during the day.

- Ask questions that kids can't answer with "yes" or "no", such as "what was your favorite part of the day." Ask your children their opinions and include them in making decisions. Show your children that you value their thoughts and input.
- Be ready to talk to your children as early as the fourth grade, when they may first feel peer pressure to experiment with alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes.
- Listen to your child's or teen's concerns nonjudgementally. Repeat them to make clear that you understand. Don't preach.

### **Get involved in your children's lives.**

Why? Young people are less likely to get involved with drugs when caring adults are a part of their life.

How?

- Spend time doing something your children want to do every day.
- Support your children's activities by attending special events, like recitals and games, and praising them for their efforts.
- Help your children manage problems by asking what is wrong when they seem upset and letting them know you are there to help.

### **Make clear rules and enforce them consistently.**

Why? Research shows that when parents set harsh rules or no rules, kids are more likely to try drugs.

How?

- Discuss rules, expectations, and consequences. This teaches children to take responsibility for their actions.
- If a rule is broke, be sure to enforce the consequences. This teaches children to take responsibility for their actions.
- Give praise when your children follow rules and meet expectations.

### **Be a positive role model.**

Why? Children imitate adults.

How?

- Demonstrate ways to solve problems, have fun, and manage stress without using alcohol or drugs.
- Point out examples of irresponsible behavior, such as ones you see in movies or hear in music.
- Remember that you set the example. Avoid contradictions between your words and your actions. Use alcohol in moderation, don't smoke cigarettes, and never use drugs.

### **Help your children choose friends wisely.**

Why? When children have friends who don't engage in risky behaviors, they are likely to resist them too.

How?

- Help your kids feel comfortable in social situations.
- Get to know your children's friends and their families.
- Involve your children in positive group activities, such as sports teams, scouting troops, and after school programs.

### **Talk to your children about drugs.**

Why? When parents talk to their kids early and often about substance abuse, kids are less likely to try drugs.

How?

- Short discussions go a long way. Engage your children in a conversation. Ask what they know, how they feel, and what they think about the issue.
- Talk to your children one-on-one and together.
- Educate yourself about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use before talking to your children. You will lose credibility if you don't have your facts right.
- Set some time aside for you and your child to act out scenarios in which one person tries to pressure another to drink alcohol, smoke, or use a drug. Figure out two or three ways to handle each situation and talk about which works best.

When?

- Any time you spend together is the perfect time for a conversation.
- Establish an ongoing conversation rather than giving a one-time speech.

What should I say?

- Explain the effects of drugs on the body and the legal consequences of using drugs.
- Make it clear that you don't want your kids to use drugs and that you will be disappointed if they do.
- Discuss why using drugs isn't okay. Explain that it's against the law for a child or teen to use alcohol or cigarettes and that using drugs is always illegal—for good reason.
- Explain how drug use can hurt people in several ways—for example, the transmission of AIDS through shared needles, slowed growth, impaired coordination, accidents.
- Discuss the legal issues. A conviction for a drug offense can lead to time in prison or cost someone a job, driver's license, or college loan.
- If any of your children have tried drugs, be honest about your disappointment, but emphasize that you still love them.

*How Parents Can Prevent Drug Abuse.* (2013). Retrieved May 6, 2013, from National Crime Prevention Council: <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/drug-abuse/alcohol-tobacco-and-other-drugs>

**\*For activity that may be drug related as well as information to gather for reporting purposes, please see page 4\***