

Communication: The Key to Keeping Your Kids Drug Free



A Division of Drug Free America Foundation , Inc.

Introduction

The National Drug Free Workplace Alliance (NDWA) proudly brings you this guide for parents. Parents are a significant segment of our workforce. As such, disruptions to their work routine can be considerable when one of their children makes a bad choice to abuse drugs or alcohol. When adverse family issues arise, it affects the productivity of the employee which in turn affects the bottom line of the employer.

NDWA is an organizational resource for employers, supporting an employer's rights to conduct a fair and profitable business and also to support his employees as a valuable resource and means to achieve success. NDWA also serves as a resource for all employees and parents to promote a safe and healthy workplace.



<http://www.ndwa.org>



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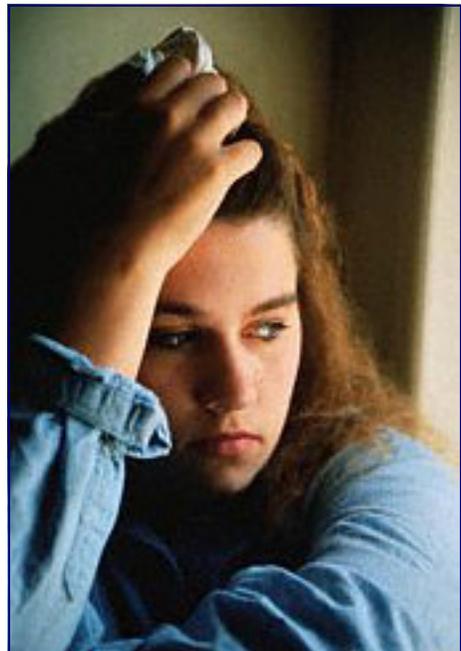


Parenting Challenges

The drug scene has changed

As parents, we come from many backgrounds, cultures, geography, education and social structure. Some may have used drugs themselves or had been exposed to drug abuse and addictive behavior as youth. All of these things contribute to the attitude we convey to our children about drug use, be it prescription, over-the-counter or illicit drugs. Parents need to know that the drug scene has evolved into a much more dangerous activity.

- **Potency** – Marijuana grown today is largely produced through “grow houses” and scientifically cultivated to maximize the THC content of the plant. Where in the mid-1970s the THC content in pot averaged less than 1 percent, the average THC content today reaches more than 6 percent, with some samples reaching up to 33 percent. The more THC that is consumed, the more intoxicated the user gets. Increased intoxication leads to involvement in riskier and more dangerous behavior.
- **Synthetic drugs** – Unlike naturally occurring drugs such as opium and marijuana, synthetic drugs are created in a laboratory utilizing chemicals such as lighter fluid and drain cleaner. During the 1980s and 1990s, invention and mass production of synthetic drug compounds such as ecstasy and crystal meth reached record levels due to inexpensive production methods and clandestine labs.
- **Internet** – The information super highway has increased the availability of information about growing pot, producing illicit substances, obtaining drugs and paraphernalia and even how to best consume the drugs to enhance the intoxication or effect of the experience.
- **Media** – The media has glamorized the consumption of drugs and alcohol into a dramatic and desirable activity, occurring even on primetime television, movies and news. The media normalizes adverse behavior, causing young people to think that “Everyone is doing drugs or drinking,” and that it is the “cool” way to act.
- **Social networking** – Access to a worldwide community of potential substance abusers through social networking sites such as MySpace and FaceBook, as well as sites such as YouTube, also directly connect potential or infrequent users with experienced users or persons out to exploit the naive and ignorant.



The shift in society's institutional structure

Society has changed dramatically in the past 30 years in many ways that challenge everyone.

- **Family structure** – We now have many more single-parent families than several decades ago.
- **Social institutions** – There is a trend away from more traditional denominational churches to non-denominational mega-churches. In addition, there is more acceptance of children from a family seeking their own religious path, or not, than ever in the past.
- **Social values** – Social values are being attacked through the media, again, by normalizing excessive and intoxicated behavior.
- **Mobility** – As America has become a national and world marketplace, families frequently move, creating neighborhoods of strangers. In addition, extended family support is lost. There has been a trend of families moving away from small towns and into large population centers. Authoritative communities (consisting of extended family, neighbors, teachers, clergy, shop owners, coaches who made it their business to know each other) of just decades ago are much less common.
- **Disposable income** – As the American economy has grown, individuals, including youth, have access to unprecedented income.

The news isn't all bad

The reality of drugs and alcohol and its effect on youth seem discouraging, but not all the news is bad.

According to the *2008 Monitoring the Future - National Results on Adolescent Drug Use*, by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the majority of youth do not use drugs. Although historically drug use peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s with approximately 55 percent of 12th grade students acknowledging current drug use (past 30-day*), it has sharply decreased to today's level of only 32 percent indicating current drug use. This means that 78% of current 12th graders do not use drugs. The numbers are even better for younger teens with about 84 percent of tenth graders and 92 percent of eighth graders choosing not to do drugs. (* Table 7—Trends in 30-Day Prevalence of Use of Various Drugs in Grades 8,10,and 12)

Contrary to conventional wisdom, parents are the most influential figures in a child's life. Studies have shown that teens who hear anti-drug messages from their parents are 42 percent less likely to do drugs. In addition, two-thirds of kids say that losing their parents' respect and pride is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs. Your words and actions matter.

Your best prevention tool is to get involved in your children's lives and get educated on the issue.



The best prevention is communication with your kids

As your kids enter adolescence, it is time to enhance your communication skills to sustain and improve the relationship with them and increase the chances of keeping your children drug-free.

Be proactive

Who, what, when, where - As your children start their drive toward increasing independence, it is important to know what your child is up to when away from home. Have your child check in with you regularly and provide them with the means to do that, whether it is with a cell phone or other means. Know the activities that your child is involved in and keep close tabs on their attendance and participation. Keep an activity calendar and contact numbers handy. Know whom they will be with at all times.

Network with other parents – Introduce yourself to other parents and get their phone numbers, home and e-mail addresses. Get to know them. Use your contacts to verify information, drivers or get-togethers involving your child.

Show up early - Show up a little early to pick up your child so you can observe their behavior and see who they are with.

Check to see that your kids are where they are supposed to be – Occasionally check to see that your child is where they told you they were.



Know the signs and symptoms - There are a number of signs of drug use, although no single sign or combination of signs is a clear indicator. Some indicators of a potential problem include:

- Drop in school attendance or academic performance
- Isolation, depression, fatigue
- Lack of interest in personal appearance
- Hostility and lack of cooperativeness
- Physical changes (persistent runny nose, red eyes, coughing, wheezing, bruises, needle marks)
- Increase in borrowing money
- Unaccounted-for cash, especially in small denominations
- Uncharacteristic withdrawal from family, friends or interests
- Change in friends
- Loss of interest in hobbies or sports that used to be important
- Change in eating/sleeping habits
- Smell of alcohol on the breath or frequent use of breath mints
- Watered-down alcohol in liquor bottles
- Sudden use of strong perfume or cologne
- Evidence of drugs or drug paraphernalia (rolling papers, eye drops, butane lighters, pipes)
- Use of incense or room deodorant
- Heightened secrecy about actions or possessions
- Evidence of inhaling products (hairspray, nail polish, white-out) or chemicals used to get high (gasoline, smell of chemicals on the person, more frequent need to purchase household products)



First, you listen

Keeping the lines of communication open is essential to creating an atmosphere of trust between you and your kids. Taking time to spend individually with each child gives him or her an opportunity to confide or share feelings with you that you might not get when in a family group. When a child asks to talk to you, try to find the time immediately rather than postponing or providing an excuse. Show your attention – kids know when you’re pretending to listen. Here are a few listening tips:

- Create together time – take a walk, ask your child to “teach” you something, go get ice cream or go fishing, for example
- Ask open-ended questions that encourage conversation
- Try to understand your child’s point of view
- Restate their issue and ask for clarification if needed
- Ask them to explain slang



Setting the rules and avoiding risk

Parents must clearly state the rules against the use of drugs, alcohol or other substances such as tobacco. The rule can be simply stated such as, "I don't want you to use any substance including drugs or alcohol, or be in a situation where drugs or alcohol are being used." Every parent must find the right way and the right time to deliver the message, but it is clear that your children know when the message is *not* being given. Setting firm rules will help your kids chart a course through the influence of peer pressure, media messages and the lure of predators on the internet and in your neighborhoods.

- **Identifying risk** – Sometimes young people don't recognize risky situations until it is too late. The ability to identify "red flags" early will help your teen avoid risk. Some examples are: being places without parents or "safe" adults in the vicinity, lying to parents about where they are going or who they are with, getting into a vehicle with anyone who is impaired, going to a "party," being alone with any non-relative adult, etc.
- **Avoiding risk** – Encouraging confidence in the child's personal conviction against the use of substances is important to help them avoid risky situations. Providing examples of avoidance language (e.g. "No thanks, that's unhealthy for me.") will also boost their confidence. In addition, employing the use of a code word or phrase to be utilized when the teen has found him or herself to be in a risky situation and in need of immediate transportation may be a lifeline when the child realizes he or she is in over their head (such as at a party where parental supervision was misrepresented – or at a teen gathering where drugs or alcohol are being used).
- **Establish limits** – Knowing ahead and discussing the limits of behavior with your kids will give them the boundaries they need to be successful.
- **Follow through with consequences** – Identifying potential consequences in advance of behavior infractions will allow you to rationally consider the ramifications while not enduring the immediate stress of your teen's errant conduct. Examples of consequences include:
 - Restrict television and internet use
 - Read and discuss information on the harmful effects of substance abuse
 - Restrict activities outside of the home
 - Restrict access to friends
 - Perform community service
 - Suspend telephone use



Catching your child with drugs

Catching your child with drugs can be devastating to a parent or family. Feelings of intense disappointment and anger may surface. If that happens, give yourself time to cool off before you talk to your child. You might want to consult with an expert, but one of the first steps is to tell your child that you do not approve of substance use or possession. Consider talking about the impact of their actions and the results of bad choices (such as addiction, criminal activity, etc.). Although your teen may deny the consequences will happen to him or her, no addict ever started using drugs with the intention of becoming addicted. Here are some suggestions for addressing substance use:

- **Seek professional help from your child's physician or counselor** – Allow the experts to help you facilitate communication and determine the next step for your teen;
- **Inform school principal (if it involves other students)** – Keeping your school principal in the loop can help the school to eliminate unlawful activity and address drug use on campus;
- **Inform other parents** – You would want to know, and so do other parents. Being part of the authoritative community of neighbors, extended family, school and community, you are helping your community to be a better, more healthful place to live;
- **Suspend allowance or other drug funding opportunities** – Give your kids one less resource to access substances; and
- **Read and discuss information about the harmful effects of drugs, alcohol and other substances** – Education and knowledge are your greatest tools.



Connecting with and influencing children

Make time to be with your kids

In a time of hectic, overbooked schedules, it's hard sometimes to find the time to give your kids the individual attention they need. You will often find that by spending more one-on-one time with your kids, providing them with your undivided attention even for short windows of time, you and your child will reap the reward of that time investment through better communication, cooperation and interest in family activities. Several ideas you may want to employ include:

- “Catch them” at being good
- Notice their strengths – such as when they are in a play, a music recital or on the football field
- Tell them how proud you are of them
- Show empathy when needed - friendship issues and school pressures sometimes pile up and a few words to acknowledge their challenges helps them cope
- Express your love for them - let them know you'll always be there for them no matter what

Use teachable moments

Having a discussion with your kids about steering clear of drugs and alcohol doesn't have to start with that goal in mind, but as a parent, finding a moment of connectedness is often the way to approach topics that are difficult to talk about. Your conversation doesn't have to be a long and serious discussion, but perhaps, just a few words that will convey your feelings about substance use. When good, two-way communication is present, your teen's “guard” will be down because they are focusing on the interaction.

Have fun with your kids – Doing things they like will get them involved and give you the opportunity to see them enjoy themselves. “I really enjoy spending time with you and seeing you have such a good time. I hope you always remember that you don't ever need drugs or alcohol to have a good time.”

Discuss books or movies – Books and movies often have a theme where the characters must make choices, or they may involve drug or alcohol use. You might ask your teen “Where do you think this person might end up in life?”

Do chores together regularly - Working together in close proximity often allows for lively chatter to pass the time. This gives you an opportunity to do a little “values clarification.” You might mention a news story about drug use and ask how they feel about the circumstances.

Eat dinner together as a family – Sharing a meal at the end of the day is an ages old tradition that works for a reason. This gathering helps to debrief what's happened that day and refocus for the next. Even if it's not every day and even if it's take-out, dinner matters!

Have your child teach you something - Finding a strength your teen has (e.g. – searching the Web, fishing, etc.) and allowing them to teach you something they are interested in shows you trust them.

Hang out – Watch a movie, sports, surf the internet. Sharing interests helps to create a bond between you and provides you time to laugh together and have fun, again allowing them to trust you.

Influence when the child isn't yours

What do you do when you suspect a youth member of your organization is using drugs or alcohol? You may have little or no direct authority over the kids. You're not their parent, their family or their teacher. Your desire was to serve kids and give back to the community. Things have changed a lot, and you're unprepared to deal with the issue of substance abuse. One thing for sure is that you know you should not ignore it. You have great influence as a significant person in the teen's life. So what should you do?

Become informed – Find out as much information as possible about both the youth's situation and about substance abuse. The science of substance abuse is clear: it is harmful and often leads to negative consequences and addiction. It has detrimental effects physically, emotionally and behaviorally.

Talk to the teen – After you have gathered information about substance abuse, have a conversation with the teen. Listen and discuss the consequences of their actions. Be sure to stay involved in the youth's life.

Identify community resources – Some resources include school counselors, family doctors or pediatricians, faith leaders, community health centers, adolescent prevention and treatment professionals, local anti-drug coalitions, law enforcement agencies and community resource officers.

Talk to the parents – It is important to relate your concern regarding their child both in your organization and at home. Explain the facts and details that have been observed. Provide information on teen drug use and resources in the community. Be there to answer questions or be a resource. Keep in mind that relatives or parents may be enabling or even dealing or providing drugs or alcohol. Consider having another adult official of the organization – maybe an officer or another volunteer experienced in counseling - assist you in addressing the substance use of your youth member.

Stay involved – A one-time conversation doesn't constitute resolution. Spend time with the youth when possible and initiate many conversations. Encourage the youth to find healthy alternatives to drug and alcohol use. Offer support to the youth's parents when appropriate.



Resources and links

Identifying community resources

Be proactive in identifying key resources in your community before a need arises. Community prevention coalitions often have many. Most communities have referral services for a variety of health and human services including the county health department, 2-1-1 referral system via telephone or internet (not in every community), hospital referral, free clinic, etc. Your physician or clergy can be great sources of information but are also good resources for referral.

Links on the web

It is important to know that there are many web sites available, but not all web sites provide factual information. Web sites provided through U.S. government agencies are well-researched and always provide the most current information. We have provided a few resources:



Drug Free America Foundation – DFAF – <http://www.dfaf.org>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration – SAMHSA – <http://www.samhsa.gov/>

Office of National Drug Control Policy – ONDCP – <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/>

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information – NCADI - <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/>

National Institute on Drug Abuse – NIDA - <http://www.nida.nih.gov/>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism – NIAAA – <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>

Drug Enforcement Administration – DEA - <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/index.htm>

Parents – the Antidrug - <http://www.theantidrug.com/>

Parents – Partnership for a Drug Free America - <http://www.drugfree.org>

Teens – Freevibe – <http://www.freevibe.com/>

Teens – Above the Influence - <http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/>

Teens – Drug Free America Foundation – DFAF - <http://www.dfaf.org/studentsection/index.php>

College – Students Taking Action Not Drugs - <http://www.studentstakingaction.org/>