

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

No parent, child, or family is immune to the effects of drugs and alcohol. Some of the best kids can end up in trouble, even when they have made an effort to avoid it and even when they have been given the proper guidance from their parents.

STATISTICS

The average American youth first tries alcohol or other drugs between the age of 11 and 14, long before he or she is mature enough to understand the risks involved.

By their senior year in high school, 93% of American teens have tried alcohol, and 63% have had it in the preceding month, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse Report. Also, 36% of high school seniors have used marijuana during the preceding year and 10.3% have used cocaine.

And the consequences – **ALCOHOL AND DRUGS CAN KILL!**

Drunk driving is a leading cause of death in young people. The National Highway Safety Administration estimates that 5,000 teenagers died in alcohol-related crashes in 2012?.

You have to scratch your head and ask – if drugs and alcohol are so dangerous, then why do TV, movies, music, and advertising often make drug and alcohol use look so cool?

WHERE DO TEENS GET THEIR DRUGS AND ALCOHOL?

Talking with your kids about drugs and alcohol can be difficult. It is a highly sensitive topic especially when statistics show that much of the alcohol and drugs taken by our youth comes from their own homes.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration recently conducted a survey asking young people, ages 12 to 20, about the nature and scope of their drinking behavior. More than 1/3 of middle school students got their alcohol from their own parents or from a friend's parent or guardian and more than 40% of the estimated 10.8 million underage drinkers in the past month got their alcohol free from adults over age 21.

But the possible consequences of drinking or taking drugs are far too dire to ignore. So even though you might stumble and falter, the stakes are too high for you to ignore and remain silent.

Discussions should begin in early childhood, long before the teenage years. Adolescence is actually the worst time to begin the discussion about drugs and alcohol, but it is never too late.

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

For teens, taking drugs or drinking alcohol has nothing to do with being “good” or “bad.” The vast majority of teenagers don’t take drugs or drink because they are clinically depressed, suicidal, or lacking in self-esteem. They do it because it gives them pleasure, the allure of experimenting with forbidden substances that promise pleasure, status, and acceptance by their peers – the same feelings as adults who consume.

As an adult do you have to have your morning coffee, your after-dinner or evening drink? These things let you feel happy and relaxed and in many instances our kids see that. Children will do what you do much more readily than what you say. So try not to reach for a beer the minute you come home after a tough day; it sends the message that drinking is the best way to unwind. Your behavior needs to reflect your beliefs and what you want your children to see.

PARENTS’ ROLE

However you look at it, whatever the age of your child, parents play a key role in how a child looks at alcohol and drugs.

Your child is more likely to stay drug-free if you and your child take the time to talk about the issue. Your child is likely paying attention to what you say even while seeming not to listen.

Children look to parents for information about life decisions and choices and most kids don’t want to disappoint their families. Parents who send a clear message of “no alcohol / or drugs” are setting expectations for their children.

Two thirds of teens say upsetting their parents or losing their parents respect is one of the main reasons they don’t drink or use drugs.

IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE, CONTACT

- A school counselor
- Physician
- Religious leader
- Local mental health center
- Local police department for counseling services
- Al-Anon
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Local hospital for available services

REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT, & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Safe2Tell (to make an anonymous report 877-542-7233)
- Colorado School Safety Resource Center (for school district workshops and training) (www.safeschools.state.co.us)
- Local Law Enforcement Agency
- Al-Anon (contact locally for meeting schedules)
- Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center (info@rmpdc.org)