

Substance Abuse Prevention

Part I What Every Parent Needs To Know



The use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs is one of the biggest problems facing young people today. This brochure is designed to help parents prevent some of these problems. Your pediatrician cares very much about your family, and wants to help if there are problems in any area—especially if you have concerns about substance abuse.

Prevention starts with parents

There are no guarantees that your child will not choose to use drugs, but as a parent, you can influence that decision by:

- not using drugs yourself
- providing guidance and clear rules about not using drugs
- spending time with your child sharing the good and the bad times

All of these are necessary to help your child grow up free from the problems of drug use.

Ask yourself a few questions

Much of what children learn about drugs comes from parents. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions about your feelings and behaviors about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.

- Do you usually offer alcoholic drinks to friends and family when they come to your home?
- Do you frequently take medicine for minor aches and pains or if you are feeling sad or nervous?
- Do you take sleeping pills to fall asleep?
- Do you use alcohol or any other drug in a way that you would not want your child to?
- Do you smoke cigarettes?
- Are you proud about how much you can drink?
- Do you make jokes about getting drunk or using drugs?
- Do you go to parties that involve a lot of drinking?
- Do you drink and drive or ride with drivers who have been drinking?
- Has your child ever seen you drunk?
- Do you let minors drink alcohol in your home?

Teach your child to say no

Tell your child exactly how you expect her to respond if someone offers her drugs:

- Ask questions (“What is it?” “Where did you get it?”)
- Say no firmly.
- Give reasons (“No thanks, I’m not into that.”)
- Suggest other things to do (go to a movie, the mall, or play a game)
- Leave (go home, go to class, join other friends)

Parents can also help their children choose not to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs in these ways:

- Build your child’s self-esteem with praise and support for decisions. A strong sense of self-worth will help your child to say no to tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs and mean it.
- Gradually allow your child to make more decisions alone. Making a few mistakes is a normal part of growing up, so try not to be too critical when your child makes a mistake.
- Listen to what your child says. Pay attention, and be helpful during periods of loneliness or doubt.
- Offer advice about handling strong emotions and feelings. Help your child cope with emotions by letting her know that feelings will change. Explain that mood swings are not really bad, and they won’t last forever. Model how to control mental pain or tension without the use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs.
- Plan to discuss a wide variety of topics with your child including alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and the need for peer-group acceptance. Young people who don’t know the facts about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs are at greater risk of trying them.
- Encourage fun and worthwhile outside things to do; avoid turning too much of your child’s leisure time into chores.
- Be a good role model by avoiding tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs yourself. You’re the best role model for your child. Make a stand against drug issues—your child will listen.

Your pediatrician understands that good communication between parents and children is one of the best ways to prevent drug use. If talking to your child becomes a problem, your pediatrician may provide the key to opening the lines of communication.

Parents guide to teenage parties

If your teen is giving a party:

- **Plan in advance.** Go over party plans with your teen. Encourage your teen to plan some organized group activities or games.
- **Keep parties small.** 10 to 15 teens for each adult. Make sure at least one adult is present at all times. Ask other parents to come over to help you if you need it.
- **Set a guest list.** The party should be for invited guests only. No “crashers” allowed. This will help avoid the “open party” situation.
- **Set a time limit.** Set starting and ending times for the party. Check local curfew laws to determine an ending time.

- **Set party “rules.”** Discuss them with your teen before the party. Rules should include the following:
 - ✓ No tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs.
 - ✓ No one can leave the party and then return.
 - ✓ Lights are left on at all times.
 - ✓ Certain rooms of the house are off-limits.
- **Know your responsibilities.** Remember, you are legally responsible for anything that happens to a minor who has been served alcohol or other drugs in your home. Help your child feel responsible for this as well. Guests who bring tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs to the party should be asked to leave. Be ready to call the parents of anyone who comes to the party intoxicated to make sure they get safely home.
- **Be there, but not square.** Pick out a spot where you can see what is going on without being in the way. You can also help serve snacks and beverages.

If your teen is going to a party:

- **Call the host’s parent** to verify the party and offer any help. Make sure a parent will be at the party and that tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs will not be allowed.
- **Know where your child is going.** Have the phone number and address of the party. Ask your teen to call you if the location of the party changes. Be sure to let your child know where you will be during the party.
- **Make sure your teen has a way to get home from the party.** Make it easy for your child to leave a party by making it clear that he can call at any time for a ride home. Discuss why he might need to make such a call. Remind your teen NEVER to ride home with a driver who has been drinking.
- **Be up to greet your child when he comes home.** This can be a good way to check the time and talk about the evening.

Talk to your teen about safe partying

Maybe your teen has been to parties where there were tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Maybe he tried them. Maybe after using them your teen did something stupid, something he wouldn’t normally do.

It’s hard for people to stay safe when they aren’t thinking clearly. How can teens keep a clear head and still have fun? Give them the following suggestions for staying safe while having a good time:

- Hang out with people who don’t smoke, drink, or use other drugs.
- Plan not to smoke, drink, or use other drugs. Do whatever it takes to help you remember.
- Use the “buddy system”—team up with a friend. Use a code word to remind each other when it’s time to leave a party.
- If your teen likes to meet new people, suggest trying some of the following activities instead of parties:

free concerts	dances
espresso bars	museums
extra-curricular “anythings”	community centers
libraries	sports events
religious activities	film festivals
athletic clubs	volunteer work

How can I tell if my child is doing drugs?

Despite your best efforts, your teen may still abuse drugs. Some warning signs of drug use are:

- Smell of alcohol, smoke, or other chemicals on your child’s breath or clothing
- Obvious intoxication, dizziness, or bizarre behavior
- Change in dress, appearance, and grooming
- Change in choice of friends
- Frequent arguments, sudden mood changes, and unexplained violent actions
- Change in eating and sleeping patterns
- Skipping school
- Failing grades
- Runaway and delinquent behavior
- Suicide attempts

How parents can help

As you read this brochure, you may be worried that your child is using tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. Before you confront your child, consider talking to friends, relatives, teachers, employers, and others who know your child. Get their impressions as to how she is doing. If others are concerned, this may make you more comfortable in your decision to talk to your child. Always choose a time when your child is awake, alert, and receptive to talking. Avoid interruptions, maintain privacy, and keep your wits about you. Go over the checklist with your child, highlighting those concerns that have you worried.

Send loving messages, for example:

- “I love you too much to let you hurt yourself.”
- “I know other people your age use drugs, but I can’t let you continue to behave this way.”
- “We’ll do anything we can to help you. If tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs are part of the problem, we must talk about it right away.”
- “If you are sad, upset, or mad, we want to help you. But our family will not permit any use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs.”

Don’t be critical (avoid these statements):

- “There’s only one reason you could be acting this way—you must be on drugs.”
- “Don’t think you are fooling me. I know what you are doing.”
- “How could you be so stupid as to start using drugs and alcohol?”
- “How could you do this to our family?”
- “Where did I go wrong? What did I do to make you start using tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs?”

Remember, if your child is using drugs, she needs your help. Don’t be afraid to be a strong parent! However, the problem could become too much for you to handle alone. Don’t hesitate to seek professional help, such as your pediatrician, a counselor, support group, or treatment program.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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