

Tips for Parents on Keeping Your Children Drug Free

The year your child high school is both an exciting and a challenging time. They are little fish in a big pond and often want desperately to fit in. Because your children may now see older students using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and may think they are cool and self-assured, your children may be tempted to try drugs too. Drug use goes up dramatically in the first year of high school.

To help your children make good choices during this critical phase, you should:

- Make sure they are well-versed in the reasons to avoid alcohol, tobacco and drugs;
- Get to know their friends by taking them to and from after-school activities, games, the library and movies (while being sensitive to their need to feel independent);
- Volunteer for activities where you can observe your child at school; and
- Get acquainted with the parents of your children's friends and learn about their children's interests and habits. If it seems that your child is attracted to those with bad habits, reiterate why drug use is unacceptable.
- To make sure that your child's life is structured in such a way that drugs have no place in it, you should:

If possible, arrange to have your children looked after and engaged in the after-school hours if you cannot be with them. Encourage them to get involved with reputable youth groups, arts, music, sports, community service and academic clubs.

Make sure children who are unattended for periods during the day feel your presence. Give them a schedule and set limits on their behavior. Give them household chores to accomplish. Enforce a strict phone-in-to-you policy. Leave notes for them around the house. Provide easy-to-find snacks.

Get to know the parents of your child's friends. Exchange phone numbers and addresses. Agree to forbid each others' children from consuming alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in their homes, and pledge that you will inform each other if one of you becomes aware of a child who violates this pact.

Call parents whose home is to be used for a party. Make sure they can assure you that no alcoholic beverages or illegal substances will be dispensed. Don't be afraid to check out the party yourself to see that adult supervision is in place.

Make it easy for your child to leave a place where substances are being used. Discuss with your child in advance how to contact you or another designated adult in order to get a ride home. If another adult provides the transportation, be available to talk to your child about the situation when he or she arrives home.

Set curfews and enforce them. Weekend curfews might range from 9 p.m. for a fifth-grader to 12:30 a.m. for a senior in high school.

Encourage open dialogue with your children about their experiences. Tell your child, "I love you and trust you, but I don't trust the world around you, and I need to know what's going on in your life so I can be a good parent to you."

“The biggest reason or adolescent drug abuse is parental neglect.”