



A Parent's Guide to **Raising Drug-Free Teens**


PREVENTION FIRST
Leadership for drug-free communities

Dear Parent,

You are the single most important influence in keeping your children drug free. In fact, research shows that

the number one reason teenagers don't use drugs is because they don't want to disappoint their parents.



We also know from many years of research that the best way to keep children and teens from having addiction problems later in life is to prevent them from first trying drugs in their teenage years.

Relax! It's not as hard as you might think.

This booklet will get you started. And we've included some of the best drug prevention Web sites, where you can get more help as you need it. Remember, you are not alone. We're here to help.

The logo for Prevention First features a stylized blue swoosh that curves upwards and to the right, ending in three yellow stars of varying sizes. Below the swoosh, the words "PREVENTION FIRST" are written in a blue, serif, all-caps font.
PREVENTION FIRST

Defining Drugs

When you hear the word “drugs” you most likely think of marijuana, meth, heroin or cocaine. But what about alcohol and tobacco? Because they are legal for adults, these are often overlooked when drugs are mentioned. Prescription drugs have to be included in your conversations as well because teens abuse these for non-medical purposes. You must make it clear to your children and teens that alcohol and tobacco are drugs that are unhealthy for them.

Kids need to know what drugs are in order to avoid them.

Getting Started

Be clear about your expectations. Begin by simply telling your kids that you expect them not to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. Then continue to repeat this message throughout their teenage years. Believe it or not, this is very effective. They really do listen, even if it doesn't always seem that way.



Be a parent. Your children need you to care enough to set limits, provide structure in their daily lives, and monitor where they are and who they are with. While these may sound hard to do, they don't have to be. Involve them in setting limits you can all live with and be open to their ideas.

Give them the right information. Your children will most likely learn about drugs from many places. Some of what they will hear, especially from friends or the media, will be wrong or meant to make drugs sound safe and fun. Let your kids know they can talk with you about the things they see and hear about drugs and that you'll help them get the right information.

Be a good role model. Eat healthy. Exercise. Share your thoughts with them. Find healthy ways to relax after work or to have fun on weekends without alcohol or other drugs. They will notice.

What You Can Do

Get the facts. Even if you used drugs when you were young, things have changed. There are new drugs being offered to kids, older drugs have changed and people are finding new ways to abuse drugs that have been around a long time. Do you think marijuana is safe and not addictive? Do you know what items around your house can be used as inhalants? Do you know how heroin can be used without needles? Before you talk to your kids, be sure you are up-to-date. You can find reliable information at:



www.drugfree.org • www.theantidrug.com • www.niaaa.nih.gov

Explain why drugs are harmful to teens. Young bodies cannot process alcohol and other drugs as well as adults because many of their organs are not fully formed. In fact, research now shows that our brains are not fully developed until our mid-20's! That means that drugs have more harmful effects more quickly in children and teens such as:

- Delayed mental and physical development
- Increased chance of becoming addicted to drugs
- Delayed development of critical thinking and social skills
- Permanent physical and mental damage from some drugs



Create a drug-free zone at home. As an adult, you have the legal right to use alcohol and tobacco. Regardless of whether you drink alcohol or smoke, here are ways to safeguard your children and teens from using these and other drugs.

Don't

- Allow illegal drugs such as marijuana in your home.
- Have a drink the minute you get home after a hard day (it teaches your child that having alcohol is a good way to relax).
- Engage your child in your alcohol or tobacco use by asking them to get you a beer or light your cigarette.
- Encourage teen binge drinking by allowing alcohol at teen parties in your home.



Do

- Keep prescription drugs locked or hidden from children and teens.
- Offer guests in your home alternatives to alcohol.
- Drink in moderation, which is defined as one or fewer drinks at a sitting for women and two or fewer drinks at a sitting for men.

Know where they are and who they are with. Youth who are regularly monitored by their parents are less likely to use drugs. It isn't always easy. Here are some steps you can take:

- Make sure they know you're asking where they will be and who they will be with because that is your job as a loving parent, not because of a lack of trust.
- Know your kids' friends and the parents of their friends. Having your children point out their friends from down the block isn't good enough. Know their faces and their voices and interact with them whenever possible.
- Limit the time your child spends without adult supervision. The after-school hours from 3 to 6 p.m. are the most dangerous time for teens to be on their own. The potential for peer pressure or boredom leading to drug use is huge during these hours alone. If you or another adult you trust can't be with your teen at home, find out about after-school programs such as YMCAs and YWCAs, park districts, schools, places of worship and libraries.



Monitoring becomes critically important when your children reach middle school. Kids at this age are strongly influenced by the beliefs of their classmates, so peer pressure becomes a major factor in their behavior.



Experts agree that youth need an increasing amount of privacy as they get older. However, you have the right and responsibility as their parent to keep your eyes and ears open. The balance between monitoring and privacy can shift if you see signs of drug use. Your child's

privacy is less important than her health and well-being. This is the time to do what you need to do and seek professional help.

Keep talking. One conversation won't do it. Don't avoid tough subjects. Use everyday situations as conversation starters. For example, talk about a television show where drug use is shown or about a sports figure or celebrity who made bad choices about drug use. Ask your child what he thinks about the situation.

Make sure that your talks are not one-sided conversations. Ask questions that are open-ended so that your kids have to respond with more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Listen and show that you respect their feelings about what they face at school and with their friends. An effective way to communicate with your children is to frame the conversation around topics that interest them and are important to them such as:

- **Appearance:**
Smoking turns your teeth yellow, gives you bad breath, and makes your hair and clothes stink.
- **Physical and mental abilities:**
Using drugs will make it hard for you to run, play sports, get good grades, etc.
- **Independence:** Breaking the rules about drug use has consequences such as losing the use of the car or no allowance.



Talking with Your 10- to 12-Year-Old

At this age, your children may be asked for the first time to try alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. They are beginning to question the information they receive from the world around them. You can still easily influence their thinking. This is a good time to reinforce their anti-drug beliefs by having open discussions where you ask for their views.

Talking with Your 13- to 14-Year-Old

It may surprise you that the average age youth in Illinois begin to use tobacco and alcohol is 14. While they are becoming more independent and may begin to push you away, this is when your child needs your support the most. You still have more power than you think to influence their values and decisions. Continue to help them sort through their thoughts and feelings about drug use and other matters that are important to them. It is especially important during these years to know where they are, who they're with and what they're doing.



Talking with Your 15- to 18-Year-Old

This is when kids are trying to figure out the kind of person they want to be. You may be relieved to know that although teens' friends play an increasingly important role in their lives, they say that a parent's influence is still important. When mothers and fathers are parents rather than pals, they greatly reduce the risk of their children drinking, smoking or using other drugs. So, hang in there. Stick with your efforts to talk openly and honestly with your children. It will pay off.

This is also the time to develop an "escape plan" with your teen if she ends up at a party where there is alcohol or other drugs, or her "ride" is drunk or high. Tell her she can call you at any time to have you pick her up, with no questions asked at the time. The next day, when you are both rested, discuss (don't lecture) what happened and encourage her to talk about what she learned from the experience. Review the family rules and praise her for following them, even in such difficult circumstances.

10 Easy Things You Can Do

1. Praise your children again and again for not using drugs.
2. Tell them you appreciate the positive things they do.
3. Encourage your kids to follow their dreams. Support activities they want to try as they figure out what they enjoy.



4. Stay aware of your children's grades and school activities.
5. Impose a curfew.
6. Make it clear that you would be very upset if your teen uses any type of drug.
7. Eat dinner with your kids three to five days a week. It's a great time to find out what they are doing.
8. Have an adult present when your children get home from school, or get them involved in a healthy activity with adult supervision.
9. Talk to other parents and tell them what your views are about drugs. Don't allow your kids to spend time in homes where you know the parents drink heavily or use other drugs.
10. Be a good role model by quitting smoking, choosing non-alcoholic beverages and living a healthy lifestyle.

Knowing When They Are In Trouble

Even with your best efforts, some teens may still use drugs. Here are some behaviors that may mean your child is using drugs:

- Sudden changes in work or school attendance, quality of work, amount of work, grades or behavior
- Unusual bad temper
- Won't take responsibility
- Change in overall attitude
- Deteriorating physical appearance and poor grooming
- Wearing sunglasses at inappropriate times
- Wearing long-sleeves in hot weather or reluctance to wear short-sleeves when appropriate
- Association with known drug users
- Often borrows money or family members begin noticing that cash is missing
- Stealing small items from work, home or school
- Being secretive or attempts to avoid attention such as frequent trips to storage rooms, restroom, basement, etc.

This is not the time to worry about whether your teen will be angry with you or what the neighbors will think. Get help. Go to www.prevention.org for a list of resources, or contact a school counselor, hospital, treatment center or social service agency.



You CAN Keep Kids Drug-Free

Every parent faces issues with their children. Remember that you are not alone. Most importantly, start talking, keep talking, listen and take action.



Prevention First is a nonprofit resource center committed to building and supporting healthy, drug-free communities through public education, professional training and effective tools for those working to prevent drug use and related issues such as violence, teen pregnancy and academic failure.

Headquarters & Clearinghouse

2800 Montvale Dr.
Springfield, IL 62704
800.252.8951

Branch Office & Library

600 West Chicago Ave.
Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60654
800.572.5385

www.prevention.org

You **CAN** Keep Kids Drug-Free.

Find out how at www.prevention.org

