



Parent Awareness Report: Reducing the Risks

Who is using drugs and alcohol in our schools? *“By the time they are seniors, almost 70 percent of high school students will have tried alcohol, half will have taken an illegal drug, nearly 40 percent will have smoked a cigarette, and more than 20 percent will have used a prescription drug for a nonmedical purpose.”*

-Nora Volkow, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse

“Experimenting” with drugs or alcohol can lead to drunk driving or blackout drinking, unsafe sex or other dangerous decisions. And for those with a genetic predisposition towards substance use disorder, those casual experiments can plant the seeds of addiction or alcoholism. **Follow these practices to reduce the chances that your child will use drugs or alcohol:**

- **Maintain a close relationship with your child during the teen years.** Encourage them while offering appropriate levels of independence.
- **Talk honestly** with your teens about drugs and alcohol. For talking tips, read our ideas on the back of this page, or go to www.drugfree.org.
- **If you drink, drink responsibly**, and don't use drugs or alcohol to manage your stress. Drinking in excess around your children increases the odds that they will develop alcohol or drug problems.
- **Lock up or hide your prescription medicines**, and pay attention to use of non-prescription medications including cough syrup and mouthwash.
- **Don't allow your teen to drink in your home** with their friends or with you. Trying to teach teens how to “drink responsibly” has been shown to increase the risk of future substance abuse.
- **Be aware of certain risk factors that *may* increase the risk of teen substance abuse.** These include a family history of addiction or alcoholism; depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety or ADHD; a lack of impulse control; or traumatic experiences such as bullying, severe illness or the death of a family member.
- **Know your teen's friends**, know what they are doing and what is important to them. Trust your gut about their friends, and keep in touch with their parents.
- **Monitor and supervise your child.** Know where they are and who they are with.
- **Stay connected with school** – academics and activities – as a finger on the pulse of your teen's performance, values, priorities and moods.





Tips for talking with teens about drugs and alcohol

You might want to start the conversation by talking about teens other than your child. *“You know, I am hearing a lot about kids bringing alcohol to your school in water bottles. I am wondering what you might be hearing about that.”*

Use “I” messages. *“I am concerned that some kids are taking their parent’s pills.”*

Listen and be engaged in the conversation. Don’t interrupt. Don’t blame. Don’t judge.

Empathize: *“It must be really hard to be left out because you chose not to drink.”*

Validate their feelings by reflecting back what you think you heard, and then ask for confirmation. *“It sounds like you felt really embarrassed when your friends teased you for not smoking pot.”*

Be your child’s parent, **not** your child’s best friend. Let your children know that your rules and your decisions are intended to protect them and help them grow up safely. They may not like your rules, but they will understand why you made them.

Clearly discuss the rules in your home, and make sure your child knows that you will enforce consequences if those rules are broken. This applies to every area of responsibility, such as curfews, driving, chores, homework, drugs and alcohol. Make sure you stick with the consequences that you discussed. Don’t waffle or give in.

Role play with your teen. Let your teen know that he or she can “save face” by using you as an excuse for not participating in dangerous behaviors. *“I can’t. My parents will ground me if they find out”* or *“Of course I want to party, but I will get in trouble”* are sentences they might use when feeling pressured by others to try drugs or alcohol.

Give your child the confidence and room to solve his or her problems. *“I bet you have some ideas about what to do differently next time. What are some possible solutions?”*

Let things cool off, if necessary. *“You know, let’s talk about this later when we are a bit more cool headed. I don’t want us to have an angry conversation.”* And keep the door open for future non-judgmental talks: *“I am always here for you to talk about anything that is on your mind.”*

