



Keeping Kids Drug Free

The best way to help keep your family drug-free is to understand the factors contributing to substance abuse and to make it a topic of regular family discussion. Teens have an alarming lack of knowledge about drugs and addiction, particularly in the case of heroin. Their school-based drug prevention education is not sufficient by itself. Some important things to know are:

- Teens and adolescents are particularly at risk for substance abuse during transition times or times of change:
 - Moving from middle school to high school or high school to college
 - Changes in relationships: his/her best friend moves away and he/she has to find a new social circle
 - Your son or daughter didn't make the team that all of his/her friends made
- Mental health issues and substance abuse many times go hand in hand as youth use substances to "self-medicate" in order to feel better.
- Prescription pain pill abuse increases the risk of heroin abuse. Prescription pain pill abuse may start with medications prescribed for sport injuries or available in the household medicine cabinet.
- 25% of those who try heroin become addicted; of those who become addicted 50% will eventually die of an overdose.
- 90% of addictions start in the teen years. You can cut the risk in half by talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol.

When talking to your adolescent or teen about drugs:

- Promote conversation about other topics to make a connection with your child. Kids and parents who talk regularly and openly stand a better chance of remaining drug-free.
- Make sure to discuss risk taking and decision making in areas other than drugs.
- Talk to them about times they've made healthy choices and reinforce those behaviors and the thinking that led to positive outcomes.
- Make sure they understand that you know they may be offered drugs.
- Offer them suggestions for refusal and role play them. Make it clear that you are their ally, and that there are serious consequences for drug abuse, physically /mentally/emotionally to them, and also financially, socially, legally, and in your household. Discuss what some of those consequences could be, both short and long term.
- Don't lecture. Start a conversation. Ask if they've ever been offered a drug, or comment on an incident in the news or on a television show. Listen to what they tell you without judgment and with compassion.
- Discuss any family history of addiction and or/mental health issues. Youth need to know any risks that are in their families.
- Brainstorm ways to handle stress and the management of mental health issues without self-medicating.