

How are the Children?



Suburban Ramsey  
Family Collaborative

## *A Kids Matter! Parent Message on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATOD)*

### **Parent Power**

Parents are the most powerful influence in their child's life and have immense impact in their decision to not use drugs and alcohol. Two-thirds of youth ages 13 to 17 say losing their parents' respect and pride is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.<sup>1</sup> Twenty percent of youth who report using alcohol say their parents would not care about their use while only 3% of youth who do NOT use say their parents would not care about their use.<sup>2</sup> **Teens listen to and care about what their parents think.**

### **Five Things That Parents Can Do To Prevent Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse**

#### **Build Connections**

Young people who have strong bonds with positive adult and peer role models, and who are connected to their family and school, are at lower risk for alcohol and drug abuse. Keep your child connected to you, positive role models and healthy activities.

#### **Talk Early, Talk Often**

Vow to talk with your child about alcohol and drugs before they leave elementary school. Instead of a "big talk", have ongoing conversations using television, news stories and examples from people in your life who have struggled with alcohol or drug addiction. [www.timetotalk.org](http://www.timetotalk.org) has the guides and tips to help you with these conversations.

#### **Reduce Access in Your Home**

Most youth who use alcohol or prescription drugs recreationally get them from someone they know or from their own home or friends' homes. Don't make it easy for kids to get alcohol or drugs at your house. Consider not keeping alcohol in your home. If you do, make it hard to access and monitor your supply. Do the same with prescription drugs.

#### **Monitor your Child's Friends and Activities**

Peer use raises your child's risk for use. Get to know your child's friends by inviting them to your home and driving them to activities. Get to know their parents so you can work together to keep kids safe.

#### **Know Current Drugs of Abuse**

Substances are different today than when you were young. The more informed you are the more your kids will listen to you. The drug guide at the partnership at [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org) contains everything you need to know about drugs today.

<sup>1</sup> *Research Update, Preventing Adolescent Substance Abuse*, Butler Center for Research, June 2010.

<sup>2</sup> 2010 Minnesota Student Survey



## QUICK TIPS:

- The mere presence of drugs (including prescription drugs), alcohol, or tobacco in the home increases the likelihood of youth using these substances.
- Know who your kids' friends' parents are and what their attitudes are about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Do they have alcohol or unsecured drugs in their home?
- Communicate clear family rules about alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.
- Discuss the dangers of driving after drinking and riding with someone who has been drinking. Talk about the consequences, including loss of driving privileges, being arrested, or hurting someone.
- Help your children understand that alcohol and tobacco are drugs along with illegal and prescription drugs. Have an affirmation in your family that says **"YOU'RE TOO GOOD FOR DRUGS"**.
- Join with other parents in making common policies about teen alcohol use.
- Discuss the dangers of "binge drinking". Be sure your child knows about the risks of alcohol poisoning.
- Be the "bad" guy. Help your children come up with ways to refuse to drink, smoke, or use drugs. (For example, kids have said "My mom and dad would kill me if I tried that.") This has helped kids say no.

## How to Talk to Your Kids

During your ongoing talks with your child, ask him to share his experiences and opinions about teens who use. Then tell him how you feel and what you expect from him. Try to be warm but firm. For example, you might want to say: ***"I'm not trying to ruin your fun. I love you and I want you to stay healthy. The best way to do that is to stay completely away from drugs and alcohol."*** Another good response is, ***"I realize there's a lot of temptation out there. I also know you're a really smart, strong person. That's why I expect you to stay clean — no matter what your friends are doing."***<sup>3</sup>

## Brain Research

A child's brain is still developing until age 25. The part of the brain that supports impulse control, decision making, planning and emotional regulation is the last to mature. Parents and teens alike benefit from understanding that when young people use alcohol and drugs it interrupts healthy brain development. This can rewire the brain for addiction and potentially cause long term effects such as decreases in IQ, reasoning and memory and even open the door to mental illness.<sup>3</sup>

## Be Aware of Higher Risk Situations

Be aware of and watch out for these circumstances which can increase the chances a child will use and possibly abuse alcohol and drugs:

- Significant social transitions such as entering or graduating from middle or high school, or getting a driver's license
- Behavioral or mental health challenges (including anxiety, depression, aggression, impulsivity, poor social coping skills) can increase a child's risk of 'self medicating' these symptoms.
- Early age of first use (If youth have their first drink before age 14, they are **4 times more likely to develop alcoholism** in their life than if they wait until after age 20.)<sup>4</sup>
- A family history that includes alcohol or drug abuse. (Children and youth have a need and a right to know if they are genetically predisposed to alcoholism.)

## My Child is Using – What Should I Do?

If you think or know that your child is using drugs or alcohol, it is important that you get your child assessed by a professional. Talk with your child's doctor or school counselor to learn more about getting help and support. In addition, share your concerns with your child, set tighter limits, and monitor your child's behaviors and whereabouts more closely.

## Resources

- The Partnership at [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org) has all the support, tools, resources and answers parents need when it comes to young people and alcohol and drugs.
- Go to [www.kidsmatterSRFC.org](http://www.kidsmatterSRFC.org) for a list of chemical health resources and treatment centers in the Suburban Ramsey County area.

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<sup>3</sup> Partnership at [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

<sup>4</sup> Hingson, R. W., Heeren, T., and Winter, M. R. (2006). Age at drinking onset and alcohol dependence: Age at onset, duration, and severity. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 160, 739-746.

<sup>5</sup> *Research Update, Preventing Adolescent Substance Abuse*, Butler Center for Research, June 2010.