

Choices: Alcohol Other Drugs and Our Children

The hours between the end of the school day and dinner time are crucial in helping to determine the life course of our young people. Those engaged in constructive activities during these vital hours are much more likely to survive the turbulence of adolescence without developing serious problems, including alcohol or other drugs issues

It is well documented that if a young person postpones the use of alcohol/other drugs until age 21, they have a great chance of never developing an abuse or dependency issue.

How can parents help to raise drug free children?

Some suggestions from the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA)

Set a good, responsible example; set rules and expect your children to follow them

Open lines of communication and keep them open

Monitor your children's whereabouts

Maintain family rituals such as dinner together (very important)

Get involved in your children's lives and activities.

Get Dad involved and keep him engaged

Engage the larger "family" of your children's friends, teachers, classmates, neighbors, and community.

Dr. Nora Volkow, formerly with Brookhaven National Lab here on the island and current Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) adds that the brains of children and adolescents are still forming and subject to external stimuli therefore parents too can have a major impact on their children's "developmental trajectory"

Dr Ross Brower at Cornell Medical center says "Parents have profound power but they need to engage." An important reminder from Cynthia Kuhn PhD, professor of pharmacology at Duke University Medical Center; "kids are making choices based on criteria adults do not remember because we don't think that way anymore". She suggests that parents are their children's "frontal cortex" because they do not have one yet.

Cultural and genetic influences are factors as well. If there is alcoholism/addiction in your family it is important to educate your children that they are significantly more susceptible to becoming chemically dependent if they drink or use drugs.

Encourage an open dialogue with your children from an early age and keep working at improving and deepening the conversation. Outline expectations while setting reasonable limits and gradually allow more individuality in choices based on responsible behavior.

If in fact the old adage about raising children, "Give them a set of values, and give them a set of wings", rings true; let us remember our children are our most precious resource and we must do our best to prepare them for potential obstacles and life challenges.

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