

Talk To Your Kids

Make your expectations clear. If you don't want your kids to use alcohol, tobacco and/or other drugs, tell them over and over again. Deciding whether or not to drink or use drugs is not a one-time decision for adolescents. They are constantly reevaluating their decisions, so learn how to keep the topic alive so you can continually reinforce your expectations. Try not to use every conversation with your kids as an opportunity to give advice or lecture. Ask open-ended questions that encourage conversation. Avoid questions that kids can answer with a simple yes or no. Try not to react to what your kids say in a way that will cut off further discussion. For example, if your child tells you a close friend tried marijuana, try not to immediately say, "Who was it? I don't want you hanging out with that person." Make it clear that you are listening and trying to understand your child's point of view. When your child describes events, repeat what you think they have just told you by saying something such as, "Sounds like you are saying..." or "When that happens to me, I feel like..." or "Do you mean that..."

Get To Know Their Teachers, Friends, And Their Friends' Parents

Talk to other parents about the expectations you have for your kids surrounding alcohol and other drug use. Do other parents have the same values and beliefs regarding teenagers' use of alcohol and other drugs as you do? Get support from like-minded parents. Make the effort to get involved with parent groups at your child's school. Spend some time with your child's friends. Invite specific feedback from teachers, coaches and other adults in your child's life. Parents of high school and middle school students don't seem to have as many opportunities to interact with other parents as they did when their children were in elementary school. Contact your school counselor to find out about support/parent activity groups for parents. You don't have to parent in isolation. Many of our parents are relieved when they come to an FCD parent meeting and learn other parents are setting early curfews, restricting driving privileges and calling ahead to check on parties their kids are planning to attend.

Be A Good Role Model

Parents have more influence over their children than they realize. Kids spend a lot of time with friends, television, music, and computers. But they are also tuned in to you. Your words and actions impact them in many ways every day. Talk with your children about how you deal with stress, disappointment, peer pressure and anxiety. Show them that you know how to celebrate, socialize and unwind without the use of alcohol. You can influence your children's behavior by observing the rules of a moderate drinker or by not drinking. (For adults who choose to drink, moderation is defined as no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men.) Think about what you say and how you act in front of your child. Your own actions are the most powerful indicator to your children of what is appropriate and acceptable for your family. Do not take part in illegal, unhealthy or dangerous practices related to alcohol or other drugs, or your child may believe that these practices are okay, no matter what you say.

Set Limits And Consequences

Teens crave limits. They want to feel safe and taken care of, but they never tell parents this! Setting clear expectations and having clear consequences for failing to meet expectations makes children feel secure. Be sure the consequences are ones that you can realistically abide by. Setting curfews and guidelines for socializing helps children make healthy choices. According to experts in child psychology, kids not only want and need limits, but they see a lack of limits as an opportunity to act out. One of the most compelling

reasons to set limits with teenagers is that they simply don't have the tools, the pre-frontal cortex development, or the judgment to consistently and appropriately regulate themselves.

Educate Yourself About Alcohol, Other Drugs, and Addiction

Use our reading list and website list to educate yourself. Often kids know far more than adults do about what is going on in the world of alcohol and other drugs. Learn about alcohol and drugs, about warning signs of use and about where you can get help in your community should you need it. FCD's website (www.fcd.org) has tons of information, as well as forums where you can ask questions.

Call Ahead For Parties

Call parents before you allow your child to attend a party. Ask if the party will be chaperoned (maybe even offer to help) and get the scoop on the alcohol and drug policy of the parents. Parents are generally more comfortable calling each other when kids are younger, but seem to call less as kids get older. Some kids won't appreciate your calling; some may say you are the only parent who calls and be embarrassed by your concern. Nevertheless, it is good parenting. According to experts, sometimes parents lose sight of the fact that they have choices. Parents can fall victim to "peer pressure" as easily as children can. Certainly some kids try to manipulate their parents by saying that "everyone" is allowed to have unsupervised parties. The reality is that sometimes parents find that their point of view is quite different from that of the masses, which can be lonely and disappointing. However, it is crucial that when parents have a strong feeling about a subject related to their children that they feel free to choose what they believe is the right path, regardless of what others may be doing.

Stay Up At Night

Wait up for your kids, or at least make them come in and wake you when they get home. Kids who know they will be greeted with a big hug and/or kiss (and sniff test!) upon returning home may be less likely to drink or smoke.

Don't Leave Your Teenagers Home Alone On Weekends

This should go without saying, but leaving teens home alone for the weekend with no supervision can be a recipe for disaster. There are unlimited true stories about good kids who had unsupervised parties that got out of control or had hundreds of uninvited guests show up. Sometimes it's not even your child's idea to throw the party. Keep in mind that in many states, social host laws hold parents responsible for what happens at parties where there is underage drinking, regardless of whether the parents were actually home during the party. Consider leaving kids with a friend's parents or another adult family member if you absolutely have to leave them.

Make Fun, Safe Activities Available For Teens

If you don't want your children drinking at parties or in clubs, offer alternatives. Too often kids will spend a weekend night just driving around or meeting other teens at remote places such as the beach or the woods. Get together with local civic groups to plan safe, drug-free activities for teenagers in the community. Whether it's at a community level or you're just offering your house for a pizza and movie night, kids really appreciate having a safe, fun place to socialize and hang out with their friends.

Help Kids Develop Protective Factors

Children are more likely to lead healthy and productive lives if they have the following internal and external protective factors in place:

- Strong problem solving skills
- Social skills such as empathy, good communication and a sense of humor
- Good self-esteem and a sense of purpose and future for their lives
- Autonomy and independence
- Realistic and positive expectations from family, school, community and self
- Meaningful participation in the world
- Support of family, school and community
- Healthy ways to manage stress

If You Sense A Problem, Talk About It With Your Child Immediately

By the time concrete evidence indicating a drug or alcohol problem surfaces in a teenager, the problem is often quite serious. Don't wait until you have proof. If you have any inkling that your child may be drinking, smoking or using other drugs, talk about it with them immediately. Tell them how concerned you are. Be clear about what you have observed in their behavior that worries you. Adolescents who are called on their behavior early are often so shocked that they got "caught" that it curtails future use. However, if the issue has progressed to the point where your child needs outside help, don't hesitate to take action. Don't blame yourself or brush it under the rug. Ask for help from a professional in your community, either at school or outside of the school community.