

Keep Talking to Your Child about Drugs and Alcohol...They Really Are Listening



Talking with our children about drugs and alcohol can be a frightening endeavor. Parents often believe that their pre-teens are not listening and don't care what they have to say. The Power of Choice recently asked several 6-8th grade students from Districts 203 and 204, "What advice would you give parents of future 6th, 7th & 8th graders?" Their overwhelming response was, "Keep talking to your kids even when it *looks* like they're not listening. They need you to keep talking...we really are listening." The truth is, young people ARE listening to their parents. The Partnership at Drugfree.org reports:

- "Kids who learn about the risks of drugs or alcohol from their parents are 50% less likely to use drugs or alcohol than those who do not.
- 2/3 of teens say losing their parents' respect and pride is one of the main reasons they choose not to drink or use drugs.
- **Yet**, only 30% of students report learning about the risks of drugs or alcohol from their parents."

So how do we start that very important conversation? Planning what you are going to say and approaching the conversation in a thoughtful, intentional way will help. It is important to keep an open dialogue with your child to encourage conversations. The DESK conversation model is a great way to organize your thoughts and create a plan.

Parenting Power Tips:

D Describe the behavior-what you see happening. Be specific and to the point.

- Clearly communicate to your child that you are proud of them and the healthy choices they routinely make
- Emphasize good choices. Talk about how being drug-free, having friends who share your values and getting involved in positive activities are great ways to keep drug-free.
- Ask your child what he/she thinks about different drugs. Get specific. It's too easy for young people to say that all drugs are bad, but then think that some are worse than others. Ask about prescription drugs (not prescribed to them) and over-the-counter drugs such as sleeping aids, diet pills and cough syrup.
- When talking to your children (ages 10-15) continue to bring up this topic since kids this age can often change their minds about drugs, being more open to it than before.

E Express your feelings about the behavior and your reaction to the behavior.

- Make sure all adults in the house are in agreement about expectations and consequences regarding underage alcohol, tobacco and other drug use and each adult takes responsibility for communicating these important messages.
- Talk about why you want them to be drug free. See article from [American Academy of Pediatrics](http://www.aapublicaffairs.org/2011/04/01/parenting-tips-keep-your-kids-drug-free/).

S State how you will help your child stay drug free.

- Demonstrate, by words and actions, your expectations and trust that if you need to do more to address problems, you will seek out the necessary education, guidance and support to do the next right thing. The Power of Choice [Parent Resource Pages](#) can help.
- Pay attention to their needs...are they depressed, anxious, struggling in some way...get them help to learn how to cope with their challenges in a healthy manner.
- Make the rules and consequences known no matter who is using. Your home and cars are drug-free zones!
- Having these important talks is all about love! You care deeply about your child and you are letting him/her know that you take your role as a parent seriously. Your goal is to do what you can to keep them safe and on a healthy path for today and for a future with open options.
- Make sure your child understands your expectations about underage drinking and other drug use and related issues (riding in cars with someone who has been drinking, arriving at a party where underage drinking is happening, etc.) and develop a plan to help them deal with those situations. Talk about the ways you can help them safely move away from those situations.
- If you find your child experimenting with alcohol or other drugs, be careful not to overreact, but *do not ignore this behavior*. Find out what your child did and why...then address those issues. Remember, early intervention is key. Talk about why it's important to be drug-free.

K Know your limits- Agree together as parents—what your consequences are

- Clearly define family consequences related to underage drinking and other drug use, ensuring that you *can* and *will* follow through.
- Your child should understand that you will allow them to experience the natural, school and legal consequences in the event of poor choices by them.
- Understand that consequences might include pursuing outside help, education and/or assessments.

It's important to continue the conversation. Young people need to hear this information early and often...and they need to hear it from their parents! Keep talking.....they really are listening!

Watch for the **February** newsletter:
Saying "No" Can be Positive

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