

Young Lives, Young Losses

Information Parents Need to Know About Illicit Substance Abuse



WHO uses substances?

Drug use is not distinctly a part of one specific social class or ethnic group. Children of all backgrounds are using drugs. The differences lie in the types of drugs being used. Children with higher socioeconomic statuses (SES) are more likely to abuse high-end drugs (i.e. cocaine, heroin, etc.) as well as prescription drugs. Children with lower SES are more likely to abuse lower-end drugs (i.e. marijuana, crack cocaine, etc.). Typically, the type of drug depends on availability — some drugs are more readily available than others.

HOW do I prevent my child from using substances?

Many parents fail to realize they have a large impact over their child's views towards illicit substances. One of the best ways to positively influence your child is to be an engaged parent:

- 1. Be there for your child** - A major part of having a good relationship with a child is showing them you are there for them physically, mentally and emotionally. Show your child you care by being present at activities and events. Get involved in their life.
- 2. Good Communication** - Start communication at an early age and continue throughout the child's life. A child needs to be able to come to you when he or she have a problem, instead of seeking advice from another source that may prove incorrect.
- 3. Set good examples** - Your child looks up to you. A child needs to see parents being a positive role model. Children are like sponges; they absorb behaviors they see and then mimic them.
- 4. Set rules for your child** - As a parent it is your responsibility to set rules for your child to follow. Drinking and using drugs must be on your zero tolerance list. Make sure your children know that and enforce these rules. If a child breaks this rule there should be repercussions every time. It may work to write out a contract with your rules for your children. This clearly shows your expectations.
- 5. Monitor your child's whereabouts** - Studies have shown that children are more likely to engage in risky behavior if there is little or no supervision. Knowing where your child is allows you to keep an eye on him or her, and to be able to find him or her quickly, in case of an emergency.
- 6. Maintain family rituals** - Studies indicate having family dinners five times a week can reduce a child's involvement with illicit substances. Family dinners are a great platform for parents/guardians to talk with children about what is going on in their lives.
- 7. It takes a village to raise a child** - Get other family members and your friends involved in your child's life. Both parents and children need support. Children do not come with instruction manuals. Having other parents to communicate with will help you become a better parent.

WHY does my child use substances?

There is no simple answer to this question. There can be many reasons why a child begins using illicit drugs. However, here are the top three reasons:

- 1. Peers** - Children's actions are heavily influenced by their peers. Children are more likely to engage in drug and alcohol use if their friends are using. This is in large part due to children wanting to feel part of the group.
- 2. Parental Use** - The "Do as I say, Not as I do" technique leaves a lot to be desired. Children absorb both language and behaviors from their surroundings. When children see their parents using and abusing drugs and alcohol, they are much more likely to do the same. Children will begin to believe that the behavior the parent is exhibiting is normal, becoming more likely to engage in the same behavior.
- 3. Self-Medication** - Children and teenagers may sometimes use drugs as a self-medication technique, due to its perceived healing qualities. This tends to happen with kids who are being bullied, abused or have suffered an injury. Often times, a child starts self-medicating for a temporary release from reality; however, it can quickly turn into a full blown addiction.

How do I talk to a child about using substances?

Most importantly, get the facts. There are many resources available to parents through the Internet, the local library, and local drug and alcohol commission. These resources contain up-to-date research and information on substance abuse. By knowing the facts, you are better equipped to talk with your child about substance use. Children are great at recognizing when adults are over-exaggerating facts, so scare tactics often will not work.

It's hard sometimes to find the right way to begin a conversation with your children about drugs and alcohol. Parents and guardians do not want to give the impression they are accusing their children, as they may shut down, begin arguing or give you the silent treatment. It is important to listen to what your children say and do not overreact to this conversation. It is also important that you are consistent with your zero tolerance policy.

Begin by asking questions:

- What do you know about drugs and alcohol?
- What do you think about drugs and alcohol?
- Do you and your friends talk about these substances? What do your friends tell you about drugs and alcohol?
- Do any of your friends, or friends' parents, abuse alcohol or use drugs when you are around them?
- Do you know what happens when you use these substances?

A Few Tips:

- Look for teachable moments in your environment, whether it's through television shows, music or advertisements.
- Establish a firm stance on where your family stands on substance use.
- Have ongoing conversations with your child. Use your own discretion on what is age appropriate.
- If the child asks you about your personal history with drug use, tell the truth. It is possible to be honest with them and still convey a zero tolerance policy. Use your best judgment.
- Make sure prescription medications are kept in a secure location.



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