



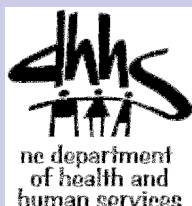
September, 2007

The Parent's Source Update from the Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment Project

"Building Bridges, Closing Gaps"



Arm your child with the information to "just say no."



This publication was produced by UNCG's Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships in collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services with financial support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (grant number 6 J79 T117387-02-2).

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"Most young people who start drinking before age 21 do so when they are about 13-14 years old. That's why it's important to start talking early and keep talking about underage drinking."¹



"Just say no" is such an understatement of what it takes for youth to avoid the pitfalls of drug use. "Saying no" is only one small piece of what it takes to keep your child from using drugs and alcohol. Talking to your children about drugs and alcohol is a huge part of this puzzle. Let your child know that drugs and alcohol are not tolerated in your household. They need to know where you stand on the issue. Children are sponges, absorbing your behaviors. It may be necessary to examine your own behaviors to make sure you are setting a positive example.

First teach your children the facts about drug use. As the parent, you need to be knowledgeable about substances and their effects. Include alcohol in the discussion. Alcohol is the number one abused drug. Visit <http://www.drugabuse.gov/consequences/> for a great overview of the medical consequences of drug abuse. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/FamilyGuide.pdf> also provides great information to families about underage alcohol abuse.

Arm your children with information about specific substances. The more they know, the less likely they are to succumb to peer pressure and the more empowered they are to make their own decisions. <http://www.intheknowzone.com/> gives teenagers detailed information about specific drugs. <http://www.drugabuse.gov/students.html> has age specific information on drugs and alcohol for your children to explore.

It is important to provide an environment that allows open communication. Asking questions is very healthy for children and youth. When your youth does communicate to you, make sure you listen carefully and respond in a non-judgmental, non-threatening way.

Parents need to talk to their children often about drugs and alcohol. They need to discuss the human cost and how one person's drug or alcohol use impacts the people around them. <http://checkyourself.com/> is a great website for teens to hear real stories from other teenagers about the consequences of substance abuse. The website's interactive style allows teens to explore facts about specific drugs, as well as ask Dr. Drew questions about substance abuse.

Give children and youth a "heads up" if alcoholism and substance abuse are prominent in the family. Inform your children of the connection between addiction and genetics. Also make sure your children understand the dangers of "experimenting" with substances. http://teens.drugabuse.gov/facts/facts_brain2.asp answers teens' questions about using drugs. <http://www.jointogether.org/news/research/summaries/2003/brain-development-makes-teens.html> explains why the teenage brain is at increased danger of addiction.

Be aware. Keep an eye on the activities that your youth participate in and the friends they hang out with. Establish clear family rules and be consistent in their enforcement. Be aware of sudden changes in behaviors and increasing secrecy. Check out the parties they are going to. Many youth begin experimenting with alcohol and drugs about the time that "boy-girl" parties start, around sixth grade or 12 years old so start talking early! Visit http://www.theantidrug.com/ei/signs_symptoms.asp for a list of symptoms.

¹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "The surgeon general's call to action to prevent and reduce underage drinking: A guide to action for families," Office of Surgeon General, 2007.