

# Keeping Kids Safe

A GUIDE TO DRUG AND ALCOHOL PREVENTION



# Stay Informed

Parents are responsible for educating their children about the risks of substance abuse and staying informed about local trends.

It's crucial to remain proactive in your kids' social lives by paying attention to their peers' interactions. As your child navigates young adulthood and is faced with peer pressure situations, offer guidance with thorough conversations and information.

According to a study by the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, pop culture plays a significant role in shaping teens' perspectives about substances.

- Forty-five percent agree that music teens listen to makes marijuana seem cool.

- Forty-five percent also say movies and television shows make using drugs look OK to do.

If you have a teenager in the household, ask for an honest discussion about their drug use views. Rather than attempting to ban them from age-appropriate media, be open about the risks and your expectations of their obligations. If relevant, share a story of someone you know who had a substance abuse problem and how it affected their life.

## REMAIN CURRENT

As an adult, it's easy to



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become disconnected from issues your children face regarding illicit substances. Even if you grew up without the urge to try drugs, don't assume your kids are traveling the same path.

It's crucial to stay involved in the community and talk with other parents about their concerns about public schools

and how children perceive peer pressure.

You can also find a great deal of information by discussing drug issues with local law enforcement. Ask them about warning signs you should notice, and if there is a rise in the community with drugs that may be rampant in teenage circles. It's also an

excellent strategy to stay relevant in your local schools' events that promote anti-drug policies.

## GET TO KNOW THEIR FRIENDS

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, most teens with substance abuse

problems began using drugs or alcohol as a result of peer pressure. Encourage your children to interact with other kids who motivate them to make the right decisions.

Get to know their friends by being involved when they hang out and invite their closest peers and families to get-togethers or vacations.

# Monitoring the Future Survey

Each year, the National Institute of Drug Abuse performs a survey to track school-aged children's substance use statistics. In 2019, more than 42,500 kids took part in the Monitoring the Future Survey.

Participants show encouraging trends in most forms of drug use, but vaping continues to be a problem, as the rate of high school seniors reporting vaping doubled compared to last year. Public health organizations use these types of studies to shape policy and inform communities about how they can help.

As you interact with public officials in your area, be sure to communicate any of your concerns to help drive decision-making. Remember that no voice is too small when it comes to protecting our children from potential dangers.

Learn the potential drug use risks and positive trends that children and teenagers show through these statistics from the 2019 study.

- Cigarette use is down by approximately 20% to 30% compared to the mid-1990s.

- Misuse of prescription opioids among high school seniors is at its lowest rate



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since the survey began assessing it.

- The rate of 12th graders who reportedly vape because they are hooked has increased two-fold over last year's survey.

- One in four 10th-graders and one in three 12th-graders report using vaping products.

- Eighty-two percent of high school seniors report that vap-

ing devices are easy to get.

- Those who reported past-month marijuana use included 6.6% of eighth-graders, 18.4 percent of 10th-graders and 22.3% of high school seniors.

- Daily use of marijuana, or use on 20 or more occasions in the past 30 days, increased for eighth- and 10th-graders.

- Past-month use of alcohol accounted for 7.9%, 18.4%

and 29.3% of eighth-, 10th- and 12th-graders.

- Methamphetamine use remained low and steady with use across all grades at less than 1%.

- Oxycontin use was reported by 1.7% of 12th-graders in 2019; a decline of nearly 50% from the survey in 2014.

- Those who reported binge drinking accounted for 3.8%

of eighth-graders, 8.5% of 10th-graders and 14.4% of 12th-graders.

- Significant five-year declines in cigarette smoking were reported by all grades and across all prevalence periods, including lifetime use.

- Only 2.4% of 12th-graders reported smoking cigarettes, which is a significant decline from 2018.

# Talking with Young Children

The topic of drug prevention can be a challenging conversation to begin with, especially for young children.

However, these essential discussions are imperative to show kids the dangers of experimenting with dangerous behavior and hanging out with the wrong crowd. As a parent or guardian, you are a child's biggest influencer. With words of encouragement, you can enhance their childhood and set them up for success as an adult.

Many moms and dads may be hesitant to have the talk until they believe their children are old enough to make poor decisions. A crucial factor to remember is that a drug-free life isn't solved with a single conversation.

You must incorporate honest dialogues frequently and evolve them as they grow. Here are some tips to remember to help you form a strategy for drug prevention, as suggested by the Partnership to End Addiction.

- Keep lines of communication open and make sure you come from a place of love and compassion. Children will be more likely to ask for your help in many aspects of life if they feel comfortable during conversations.

- Balance any punishments with positive encouragement.
- Pay attention to the natural



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opportunities to discuss substance abuse and form them into teachable moments.

Here are more ideas from the organization to promote drug awareness at an early age.

## **PRESCHOOL**

While the topics of drugs will be too involved for a pre-

school aged child to grasp, use the time to lay the foundation for healthy habits. For instance, encourage them to take a daily vitamin and express the benefits of how it helps them develop. Then, discuss how they should only trust the vitamins that are provided by a trusted adult.

Taking medicine from someone else or ingesting too many can be dangerous.

## **EARLY ELEMENTARY**

Your child will likely question things they see on television or throughout their daily lives. Be honest and open about their inquiries on anti-

drug commercials they witness or words they hear in school. Make sure to discuss the difference between illegal drugs and medicinal uses to avoid building a fear for helpful remedies. As a parent, you should also be mindful of your behaviors' impact on their development.

# Red Ribbon Week in the Classroom

Red Ribbon Week is celebrated annually each Oct. 23-31. It is the nation's oldest and largest drug prevention awareness program.

The message is clear: Americans should pledge to live drug-free and honor the sacrifice of those we have lost in the fight against drugs. As a teacher or school leader, you have the unique opportunity to create engaging activities that help children understand the risks of taking illicit substances.

According to the Campus Drug Prevention group, Red Ribbon Week was organized to celebrate special agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena. In 1985, he worked as an investigator following traffickers in Mexico, where he was ultimately murdered. As a tribute, his high school friend, Henry Lozano and Congressman Duncan Hunter created the Camarena Club to honor Kiki. They chose to wear red ribbons and show their opposition toward drugs.

If you're struggling to introduce the campaign's message in your classroom, consider these ideas suggested by the organization Get Smart About Drugs.

## PEP RALLY

Invite students, their families and teachers to celebrate the week with a campus-wide



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pep rally. Here, you can hand out red ribbons to show your commitment to honoring the celebration. Encourage the parents and congregation of students to promise to live drug-free by taking the National Red Ribbon Campaign Pledge.

Before the event, network with drug prevention advocates and ask them to speak at the rally. Some ideas when

recruiting speakers are local law enforcement officers, rehabilitation facility leaders and successful citizens that overcame a dependency on illicit substances.

## START A WEEKLY CLUB

If your school has a program for organized clubs, consider including a weekly Red Ribbon Week meeting. Students should be encouraged to dis-

cuss their concerns about drugs and interactions with peers when they felt pressured. They can bounce ideas off like-minded friends about turning down unwelcome behaviors and continuing their drug-free lifestyle.

## CREATE A STATISTIC SHEET

It's essential to show the entire student body the risks of

becoming involved with substance abuse. Take advantage of resources provided by groups like the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services to discover concerning statistics. Create a brochure for students to visually analyze the data and read a few facts over the PA during daily briefings.

# The Effects of Substance Abuse

Even with proactive measures to teach children about the dangers of drugs, it's possible that they will experiment as they get older.

As a parent, discovering this behavior can be devastating, but being prepared with how you will respond is crucial for a more positive outcome. A conversation that asks about substance use can be challenging, especially if you don't already have an honest and open relationship.

Before confronting a child about their potential drug use, it's a good strategy to plan out your discussion points. The Partnership to End Addiction suggests following these steps as you plan to approach a discussion.

## UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

You should know that substance use during adolescence can hinder the brain's ability to develop fully. Learn the effects of drugs to teach them about the damage they may be causing.

Here are some ways that addiction affects significant brain areas, as reported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

• **The brain stem.** The major component oversees breathing, moving blood and digesting food. It ties into the



spinal cord, allowing us to move muscles and limbs and let the brain know what's

happening to our body.  
• **The limbic system.** Controls the emotional

responses such as pleasure and love, encouraging us to repeat the behavior that

causes emotions.

• **The cerebral cortex.** Divided into four lobes, the cortex processes information from our senses, acts as a thinking center and powers our ability to think, plan, solve problems and make decisions.

Prepare to educate your child that these essential parts of their bodies can be harmed or hindered by taking illicit substances during development.

## ADDRESSING THE SITUATION

As you begin the conversation, it's crucial to remain calm, express how much you care for your child and value their honesty by listening without passing judgment. Listen to the reasons they began experimenting and discuss how to avoid peer pressure during future interactions.

It is also beneficial to use a physical connection like hugs or placing your hands on their shoulders in a signal of support. Ensure that they can always come to you for guidance and thank your child for their honesty and willingness to share their feelings.

Going forward, parents should periodically check in on their young children's social lives and academics. Keep in mind, they may feel embarrassed about their developing emotions, so open and honest dialogue will help create a stable and comfortable setting for serious conversations.

# The Risks of Gateway Drugs

Research has tried to determine the link between how drug use begins and how it progresses over the past two decades.

They discovered that risk factors specific to a person can be decreased by taking protective measures. While everyone has the personal responsibility to avoid addiction, educating them on the hazards from illicit substances can help curb the appeal.

Promoting drug prevention in your child's life begins at a young age. Fortunately, there are signs to look for when their behavior shows rebellion clues and makes them more at risk for trying gateway drugs.

Check out these tips from the The National Institute on Drug Abuse to recognize issues and how to help remediate the problems.

- **Early aggressive behavior.** An individual should be urged to show strong self-control.

- **Lack of parental supervision.** Parents should take a more hands-on approach toward monitoring.

- **Substance abuse.** Peers, can demonstrate academic competence to encourage better behavior.

- **Drug availability.** School leaders should use anti-drug policies to improve education.

- **Poverty.** Community involvement with a secure neighborhood attachment can



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give the youth a sense of belonging and companionship.

Resolving these actions before they become a problem is crucial in developing healthy children and their mental and physical health.

## THE GATEWAY DRUG HYPOTHESIS

According to "Drug Involvement: Examining the Gateway Hypothesis," the

gateway theory of substance abuse is the idea that the use of one substance will lead individuals to be at a greater risk to abuse other substances.

The American Addiction Centers reports that animal models of addiction show that when drugs are introduced at an early age, the probability of developing addictive behaviors increases. During post-mortem exam-

inations, the reward system section of their brain is altered compared to drug-free animals.

Human studies show that there may be a genetic component to drug abuse and reflects individuals who abuse more than one substance. Researchers also find that environmental and personal factors are commonly contributed to drug abuse.

## EXAMPLES OF GATEWAY DRUGS

While teens and children should be educated about the fact that all drugs can harm their bodies and health, the AAC urges parents to recognize these gateway substances: nicotine, alcohol and marijuana.

Show your child how to be aware of unwelcome situations involving illicit drugs and saying no when asked to try one.

# Prevention in the Community

While a drug-free lifestyle may begin at home, protecting your community can also benefit local children.

Get involved with substance abuse prevention by teaming up with other parents and officials. Building a safe environment together will create a sense of companionship and positive reinforcement.

Follow the National Institute on Drug Abuse advice to develop a strong community plan that follows these guidelines.

- Identifies the specific drugs and other child and adolescent problems in the area.
- Builds on existing resources like current drugs abuse prevention resources.
- Develops short-term goals relevant to the implementation of research-based prevention programs.
- Projects long-term objectives so that plans and resources are available for the future.
- Incorporates ongoing assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention strategies.

Work with the local government to host an event open to peers and parents. Attendees should discuss their concerns and brainstorm prevention ideas.

## FUNDING PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry suggests that the



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average age of children who try marijuana is 14. Experimenting with alcohol begins as early as age 12. Because drug use can be dangerous to young children's health, prevention programs at school are crucial.

In addition to state and local governments, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration says that individuals are significant funding sources for nonprofits. Consider working with leaders

to organize a community-wide event to collect donations. When planning the fundraiser, decide how much you need to make the fundraiser a success. Create a committee to oversee details like creating donor lists, managing the donations and work with advertisers to spread the message.

## COMMUNITY-COST BENEFITS

Communities should con-

sider the costs of starting a program as local investments. The NIDA uses two drug-prevention campaigns as examples of how they enhance cost-effectiveness. Each organization found net benefits by preventing adult cases of alcohol abuse and saving future costs for treatments.

• **The Iowa Strengthening Families Programs.** Benefit-to-cost ratios were \$9.60 for each dollar invested — each family

in ISFP condition accounted for \$5,923 in benefits.

• **Preparing for drug-free years.** Families in PDFY condition resulted in \$2,697 in benefits. Each dollar invested in prevention resulted in \$5.85.

A quality drug awareness and prevention plan can help the children in your community while saving the local economy from treatment centers' expenses.