



Laying Down the Rules About Alcohol and Drug Use: Tips for Parents

Parents, you are the first line of defense when it comes to your child's drug use or drinking. And you do make a difference! Nearly two-thirds of teenagers see great risk of upsetting their parents or losing the respect of family and friends if they smoke marijuana or use other drugs.

There are some simple steps you can take to keep track of your child's activities. Of course, your kids might not like you keeping tabs on where they are and what they're doing. It won't be a democracy, and it shouldn't be, according to many parenting experts. In the end, it's not pestering, it's parenting.

- **Set rules.** Let your teen know that drug and alcohol use is unacceptable and that these rules are set to keep him or her safe. Set limits with clear consequences for breaking them.
- **Praise and reward good behavior for compliance** and enforce consequences for non-compliance.
- **Know where your teen is and what he or she will be doing during unsupervised time.** Research shows that teens with unsupervised time are 3 times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs. Unsupervised teens are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as underage drinking, sexual activity, and cigarette smoking than other teens. This is particularly important after school, in the evening hours, and also when school is out during the summer or holidays.
- **Talk to your teen.** While shopping or riding in the car, casually ask him how things are going at school, about his friends, what his plans are for the weekend, etc.
- **Keep them busy**—especially between 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and into the evening hours. Engage your teen in after-school activities. Enroll your child in a supervised educational program or a sports league. Research shows that teens who are involved in constructive, adult-supervised activities are less likely to use drugs than other teens.
- **Check on your teenager.** Occasionally check in to see that your kids are where they say they're going to be and that they are spending time with whom they say they are with.
- **Establish a "core values statement" for your family.** Consider developing a family mission statement that reflects your family's core values. This might be discussed and created during a family meeting or over a weekend meal together. Talking about what they stand for is particularly important at a time when teens are pressured daily by external influencers on issues like drugs, sex, violence, or vandalism. If there is no compass to guide your kids, the void will be filled by the strongest force.
- **Spend time together as a family regularly and be involved in your kid's lives.** Create a bond with your child. This builds up credit with your child so that when you

have to set limits or enforce consequences, it's less stressful.

- **Take time to learn the facts about marijuana and underage drinking** and talk to your teen about its harmful health, social, learning, and mental effects on young users.
- **Get to know your teen's friends (and their parents)** by inviting them over for dinner or talking with them at your teen's soccer practice, dance rehearsal, or other activities.
- **Stay in touch with the adult supervisors of your child** (camp counselors, coaches, employers, teachers) and have them inform you of any changes in your teen. Warning signs of drug use include distance from family and existing friends, hanging out with a new circle of friends, lack of interest in personal appearance, or changes in eating or sleeping habits.

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