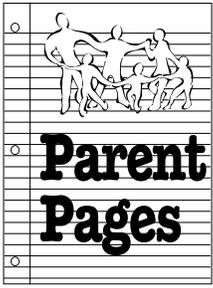


Raising Drug Free Kids



Substance abuse prevention efforts in the late 1960s and 1970s targeted youth, providing information about drugs, strategies for resisting peer pressure and programs for enhancing self-esteem. Today, experts recognize that efforts focused solely on youth aren't enough. Effective programs must encompass the social elements that support and guide youth. Today's most effective prevention programs are believed to target three levels: youth, their families and their communities.

The family is a particularly important link in the chain. Studies indicate that parents are the strongest prevention influence on youngsters. Families play a key role in developing resilient youth that can withstand pressures to become involved in unhealthy lifestyles.

Parents can become aware of the characteristics of youth most at risk.

- ◆ *They begin drinking before the age of 15.* Early drinking - in or out of the home - may lead to later drug use.
- ◆ *They are unsupervised for large amounts of time.* Unmonitored, unsupervised time is one of the highest risk factors for children and youth.

- ◆ *They lack social skills.* The easiest group to belong to is the one that uses drugs.
- ◆ *They have little interest in school and do poorly academically.*
- ◆ *They do not participate in after-school activities.* Extracurricular activities sponsored by the school and other community organizations give children an opportunity to develop friendships with others their age. Encourage youngsters to sign up for clubs and groups that are interesting to them. If such activities are unavailable in your community, organize with other parents to see if such activities can be offered through either the school or community.
- ◆ *They spend most of their free time with peers.* Youth with strong bonds to their family and school are less likely to become involved with drug-using friends. While spending more time with friends and less with family is part of growing up, too much unsupervised time with friends can lead to problems.

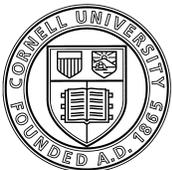
Kids who exhibit one or more of the above characteristics are not doomed to abuse drugs. When children do have some of these characteristics, it is important to encourage them toward behaviors that will increase their resistance to drugs. Youngsters with a low risk of drug abuse have strong bonds to their family and school.



The drug-resistant child has parents who:

- ◆ *Spend time with their children each day.* These parents let their children know they are important to them.
- ◆ *Spend time listening to what their children have to say.* When their children seem worried, these parents let them know they are willing to help them talk about and help them solve their problems.
- ◆ *Let their love shine through.* While it is easy to become angry about the occasionally obnoxious behavior of children and teens, it is important to let them know every day that you love them. Hugs and kisses and expressions of love are important to children.

~Continued~



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- ◆ *Know who their children with and what they are doing.* Though some children, especially older ones, resent a parent's prying, it is important to send the message that you are interested and concerned about what they are doing, who they will be with, and when they will return home.
- ◆ *Set clear limits for behavior.* Parents of youth least at risk usually have clear rules about homework, television use, curfew, drugs and alcohol. While they may appear to be stricter than other parents are, they are not harsh. Parental disapproval remains an important deterrent. Surveys indicate that the more teens believed that their parents would be upset, the less likely they were to use alcohol or drugs.
- ◆ *Use praise and encouragement to reinforce good behavior.* Parents of youth least at risk use very little punishment. Parents of youth most at risk, on the other hand, use punishment frequently but inconsistently.
- ◆ *Model good problem-solving skills.* Parents of youth least at risk help their children to understand that drugs and alcohol are not solutions. These parents help their children to identify problems and go through the steps of effective problem solving.
- ◆ *Have realistic expectations.* Parents of drug-resistant children do not pressure their children to succeed beyond their abilities.
- ◆ *Help their children develop strong self-concepts and strong social skills.* They encourage their children to develop interests and skills that foster self-esteem. It is important that children learn how to get along with others and how to cope with the anxiety and tension that everyone experiences from time to time.

Parents are a powerful force in the fight against drugs. Helping your children learn how to make healthy decisions will pay off well in the future.

Source: Dr. Patricia Tanner Nelson, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.