

Steering Clear of Danger

HELP YOUR TEENS STAY OFF DRUGS

Cocaine and marijuana aren't the topics of many discussions around the family dinner table but should they?

Considering the statistics, the answer is "yes". Between 1991 and 1996, the percentage of eighth-graders who said they used illegal drugs in the past year rose from 11.3 percent to 23.6 percent, according to a study by The National Institute of Drug Abuse.

As a parent, you can combat these numbers by helping your child to stay drug-free. Following these tips can help.

Stay connected. An unsupervised teen is a teen in danger of using drugs, so keep updated on where your child is spending time. If you meet your teen's friends and their parents, you'll be more connected to your child's life.

Beat the clock. Marijuana is the most widely used illegal drug in the United States. The average age that a child first tries marijuana is 13 years. According to The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 43 percent of American teenagers say marijuana is easier to buy than cigarettes or beer. It's vital that you teach your kids about the dangers of drugs long before they're ever exposed to them.

Encourage academics. Perhaps because of poor self-esteem, children with poor grades are particularly prone to drug use. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends building your child's sense of self-worth by praising academic accomplishments and refraining from frequent criticism.

Show you care. If you are an involved and supportive parent, your child is less likely to risk your disappointment by experimenting with drugs.

Know the facts. Learning about the dangers of drug use will help you educate your child about the risks. For more information, call The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-729-6686.

Warning signs. Watch for these signs if you suspect your child is using drugs, says the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- Bloodshot eyes
- Falling grades
- Change in friends
- Unusual demand for privacy
- Less communication
- Changes in dress and grooming
- Mood changes
- Poor sleeping habits
- Irregular eating patterns
- Theft of family possessions
- Attempts at suicide or running away
- Hyperactivity
- Repeated accidents, fights or arguments



Just because your child doesn't "look" like a teenager in trouble doesn't mean he/she isn't doing drugs.

Alone, each sign is not worrisome. If you notice more than two warning signs, your teen could be in trouble.

Information from Foundation Health & Health Net Magazine.