

Drugs and Alcohol

Guidelines for Initiating a Healthy Parent/Teen Conversation

Numerous research studies have shown that *parents can positively impact their teens' decisions about alcohol and drug use by talking with them about it.* It is particularly important to have conversations about drugs and alcohol prior to social activities, whether private parties or school-sponsored activities such as Homecoming and Prom.

Suggestions for starting this conversation with your teen and setting appropriate boundaries:

- Ask your teen what he/she knows about alcohol and what he/she thinks about teen drinking, including why kids drink. *Listen carefully without interrupting.* This approach can help your teen feel heard and respected, and leads into further discussion.
- Although many kids believe they already know everything about alcohol, myths abound. Some facts to share:
 - Alcohol is a powerful *drug* that slows down the body and mind, impairing coordination, vision, clear thinking, reaction time, and judgment.
 - Beer and wine are not safer than hard liquor.
 - The younger a person begins to drink or use drugs, the higher the likelihood they will become addicted.
 - On average it takes 10+ hours for a single drink to leave the system. Nothing can speed up this process, including coffee, cold showers or “walking it off.”
 - People tend to be very bad at judging how seriously alcohol affects them. Many people who drive after drinking think they can control a car, but actually cannot.
 - Anyone can develop a serious alcohol problem, including a teen. In fact, the mean age of alcoholism is now 16 years of age.
- Talk about good reasons why teens shouldn't drink or use drugs (it's illegal, to maintain self-respect, it can be dangerous and unhealthy, etc.). Don't forget to emphasize that YOU want your child to avoid illegal drugs and alcohol. Remember that your values and attitudes count with your child, even though he or she may not always show it.

Please Remember

It is illegal for parents to host parties where there is underage drinking. By Montgomery County law, parents can be held responsible and may be subject to heavy fines if there is any underage drinking on their premises. If you are out of town, please consider arranging chaperones for your home.

Please see reverse side for some additional information

- Set limits and monitor your teen's whereabouts. Ask your teen to tell you his/her destination whenever he/she leaves home, and to call if plans change. If it sounds overly vague, ask for more specifics. If you find that your teen was not completely up front in explaining his or her whereabouts, restrict his/her privileges for a while.
- Band together with other parents and present a unified front against drugs and alcohol. If none of the teens in your child's group have total freedom, peer pressure will be reduced.
- Put yourself in your teen's shoes. Talk to her/him about what might help to resist peer pressure. "Just say no" wears a little thin by the teen years, but you might brainstorm tactics together, such as "I don't drink (smoke) because I don't like the taste." "I'm not going to have a drink because if the coach finds out, I'll be kicked off the team." "If my parents find out I won't be able to use the car for a month."

Whitman sponsored an "Every 15 Minutes" program, including a mock crash scene, a video and an assembly about the potentially tragic consequences of drinking and driving. If you or your teen hasn't viewed the video, it is highly recommended and accessible in two parts at: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=KDmBqzJs9QQ> and <http://youtube.com/watch?v=9w9ildFBKvs>

Many helpful sources exist for setting firm boundaries within a warm parent-teen relationship. See:

- <http://life.familyeducation.com/teens/drugs-and-alcohol/48621.html?page=2>
- <http://www.alcoholfreechildren.org/en/pubs/html/makeadifference.htm>
- <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/Prevopen.html>
- <http://www.focusas.com/Parenting.html>.