

Drug Prevention Tips for Parents

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Resources for Parents

There are more than 1,200 Teen Challenge programs in 106 countries of the world. According to the United Nations, more than 250 million people worldwide struggle with drug abuse. At Teen Challenge, we are committed to doing everything we can to reach people around the globe with life controlling problems, and it all starts with prevention.

Through the years we have received thousands of heartbreaking calls from parents in need of hope and help for their children. One father, whose words will remain in our hearts for years to come, said the following, "If I had spoken to you two weeks earlier, I might not have buried my son..." this father's sad and grief-filled words because of the loss of his young son from a drug overdose. His word's echo the resounding need for drug prevention in the lives of young people.

At Teen Challenge we have seen first-hand the devastation of drug addiction and want to provide drug prevention tips for parents, to prevent drug addiction before it has a chance to begin. Here at Teen Challenge we believe as Benjamin Franklin said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." For more than 50 years Teen Challenge New England and New Jersey has helped thousands of men, women and youth find freedom from addiction, and we rejoice in the miracles of changed lives; however, there is something far better than intervention. There is prevention. We want to prevent children and teens from drug and alcohol abuse and equip parents with drug prevention tips.

"Each year federal, state and local governments spend close to \$500 billion on addiction and risky substance use, but for every dollar that federal and state governments spend, only 2 cents goes to prevention and treatment," according to CASA Columbia.

Casa Columbia also reports that more than 90% of people with addiction problems began smoking, drinking or using other drugs before age 18.

Through the years, we have found some helpful tips that we hope will equip you with tools to help your children stay drug free. As parents, the tendency can be to think, "addiction can never happen to my child." However, drug addiction and alcoholism can happen to anyone. Addiction knows no bounds. Addiction affects people from all social, ethnic and economic backgrounds; Our goal is to prevent it.

Tips for Drug Prevention for Parents

Lock up your prescription medications

Countless young people have started experimenting with drugs in their parent's medicine cabinet. Locking up your prescription medications cannot be stressed enough. All it takes is trying pills one time to begin a lifetime of addiction. Advice to parents is to lock up prescription medicines and consider drug testing your kids at home. If teens are asked to use illegal substances, they can tell their friends they can't because they are drug screened at home. This can be an effective tool to combat peer pressure among teens.

Talk to your children early and often

Talk to your children early and often. Capture every opportunity to talk to your kids about drugs - you'll be alerting them to potential dangers in their environment. Have frequent age appropriate conversations with your children and teens. Tell your child you want them to be drug free and hold them accountable. Drug testing can be helpful with this.

Clear communication with your children helps them deal with peer pressure. For example, the role playing of specific situations is one way to help your child know just what to say.

Most of all, tell your children you love them as often as you can, because children who know they are loved are less likely to disappoint those who love them. Know where your children are going and with whom. Get to know their friends and parents so you will be familiar with their activities. Make your own home available to your children's friends.

Make quality family time a top priority

Spend time with your children and teens. Decide how you can make high quality, enjoyable family time a habit. The little things make a difference, play board games at bedtime, a family snack, go out of your way to show your children and teens that you care.

Spending time with your kids and building their self-confidence helps insulate them from risky behaviors. Children who feel good about themselves are less likely to deviate from what they know is right. Show you kids that you care by spending quality time talking with them. Quality time can also be spent doing fun family activities like sports and outdoor activities.

Have Family Dinners

Eating dinner together as a family can drastically lower your teen's chance at smoking, drinking or using drugs. According to the CASA report at Columbia University, "Kids who eat 3 or more meals weekly with their parents are less likely to use drugs," and "Eating family dinners of at least five times a week drastically lowers a teen's chance of smoking, drinking and using drugs."

"Teens who have fewer than three family dinners a week are 3.5 times more likely to have abused prescription drugs and to have used illegal drugs other than marijuana, three times more likely to have used marijuana, more than 2.5 more likely to have smoked cigarettes, and 1.5 times more likely to have tried alcohol," according to the CASA report at Columbia University. The more often you have dinner together, the more you prevent drug addiction. Make dinner time a special family time. Turn off phones and electronics; enjoy the company of your family members. Especially try to connect and not use the time to criticize, complain or argue.

Meaningful Conversations

Have meaningful conversations with your kids. Connect with them. *"An average parent spends 38.5 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their kids."* Meaningful conversations build healthy family relationships. Learn to actively listen to your kids. Show them love in a variety of ways and be sure to communicate with them daily.

If what you are doing cannot be interrupted, tell them and prioritize a time to talk immediately after finishing - then do it. Few things should get in the way of listening to our kids when they want our attention.

Focus on what "good things" you want to develop within your child. Develop these by spending time together as a family and individually with each child. Show plenty of affection often and in a variety of ways. Make sure your child knows how much you love him/her. Use hugs, kisses, and lots of words of encouragement - pay attention to what you say as well as how you say it. Strengthen your child's decision making skills by providing choices. These can include where to sit at the table or what game to play.

Don't ignore the red flags

Don't dismiss changes in behavior as "normal" teenage behavior and don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't fall prey to the "not my kid" syndrome, remember addiction can happen to anyone.

Regardless of the attitudes toward marijuana use and the decriminalization of marijuana, the fact remains that kids who use illegal drugs are more at risk because their brains are not fully developed until they are in their 20's. If a child uses marijuana, he or she is more vulnerable for other risky behaviors. According to the National Institute on Drug abuse, "studies of high school students and their patterns of drug use shows that very few young people use other drugs without first trying marijuana. One of the reasons is smoking marijuana puts teens in touch with those who sell drugs- all types. Long-term studies of high school aged teens patterns of drug use show that most teenagers who use other drugs have smoked marijuana drank alcohol or used tobacco first."

"Teens who use drugs are five more times likely to have sex than teens who do not use drugs," according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. Teens have been known to start experimenting by age 13 or younger and some teens can hide it from their parents for more than 2 years.

Shared Values

Be a living example of what you want your kids to be. Then clarify family rules and discuss the consequences of breaking them. Young people are less inclined to use tobacco, alcohol or drugs when parents set clear rules prohibiting their use. Probably the greatest value parents and grandparents can share with their kids is a personal vibrant faith. Getting involved with a local church that has a youth group can be a positive outlet for your teen. Yet even though young people who attend church are not immune from trouble, research shows that those who indicate a personal faith in God, participate in church and other extracurricular activities, are less likely to indulge themselves in drugs or alcohol. Parents, you can provide good models for your children by what you do and what you avoid doing.

The Signs Something is Wrong

Some Common Signs That Your Child is Using Drugs or Alcohol

When children start using drugs. they usually exhibit many different signs which parents need to watch out for. Unfortunately, many parents often write-off these signs as normal adolescent behavior and as a result they don't realize that their child is into drugs until it is too late. So how can you as a parent know for sure whether or not your child is in danger of falling into drugs? Simple ... by understanding that every child is in danger of this. Parents who says "not my kid" are the same parents who will miss all the signs that their child has started experimenting with drugs. Often they will stay in this state of denial till their son or daughter is arrested or overdoses, and by then it is too late. So what should you as parents be looking for as signs that your child is experimenting with drugs or alcohol?

Dramatic changes in style of clothes, hair, music

These outward signs of rebellion should be obvious to a parent. Has your child started listening to radically-different music such as heavy metal or punk rock? Is your kid coloring their hair some weird color just to fit in? Is your child dressing down to fit in with friends at school? All of these are outward signs that your child is succumbing to peer pressure and all these should serve as warning signs to you that your child is in danger of falling into the same kind of peer pressure when it comes to drugs.

Hanging out with a bad crowd

Your child might try and tell you that his/her friends are cool kids. But you need to take a close look at the kinds of kids your child is hanging out with. Chances are the way these friends behave is the way your child behaves when you're not around. Do some of your child's friends smoke cigarettes? If so, odds are your child is smoking too. Your child's friends are like a mirror for your son or daughter -- they look at themselves in that mirror and try to conform to what they see there. One of the best ways to get a good idea of what your child is like is to look at their closest friends.

Tardiness and/or truancies

You need to stay in touch with your child's school. Never assume that his/her school will be in touch with you if there is a problem. If your child is getting into drugs, odds are he/she will start ditching class from time to time. Kids who do this tend to take off during the middle of school and get stoned somewhere near the campus. Don't assume that their school will let you know about this kind of behavior. And you need to realize, kids are great at covering up this kind of behavior. Every kid knows how to forge their parents' signatures -- no joke. Call your child's school from time to time and ask about your child attendance record. You need to take the initiative here!

Isolating from family

Does your child act distant? When you ask your child what he/she has been up to, does your child give some vague reply? Does your child want to eat in his/her room all the time instead of with the family? Children are smart - they know that the easiest lie to tell is the one they can avoid having to tell. If your child doesn't tell you what he/she has been up to, there's a good chance your child is hiding something.

Changes in attitude and personality

Does it seem like your child is suddenly a completely different person with a new personality which you don't like one bit? Has your child suddenly developed a tough guy/girl attitude? If your child is experimenting with drugs, there's a good chance you'll be seeing these kinds of attitude changes. Often parents just see this as normal teenage behavior and write it off. Don't make this mistake . . . otherwise you might overlook one of the most obvious signs of your child's drug problem.

Changes in sleep patterns

These kinds of changes should be fairly obvious. Does your child stay up late (or even all night) frequently, refusing to get up in the morning at a decent time? Does your child sleep way too much or way too little? If your child isn't sleeping much, there's a good chance he/she is using drugs. This is a frequent effect of some type of stimulant.

Excessive use of foul or obscene language

Has your child suddenly developed a filthy mouth? This might indicate that your child is giving into peer pressure from their friends and should be a warning sign to you. If your child is trying to fit in with their friends by cursing, sooner or later your child will probably look for other ways to gain acceptance in his/her peer group. One of these ways is often drugs.

Eating way too much or way too little

Here's another obvious sign of drug experimentation that is often overlooked as normal teenage behavior. Does your child come home in the afternoon after hanging out with friends and devour everything in the refrigerator? If your child is smoking pot with his/her friends, it wouldn't be unusual for your child to eat a bit more food than normal. Does your child skip quite a few consecutive meals? Then speed use is a possibility.

Paranoia - everyone is out to get me

Does your son or daughter treat others as if they were the enemy? Do they tend to express the idea that everybody is out to get them? Do they seem overly paranoid to you? This is not normal teenage behavior; you need to understand that. This is one of the most common signs of drug abuse. It's one of those signs you don't have to look hard to see.

Dilated eyes - red eyes - glazed eyes

Do your son's or daughter's eyes look funny? Are the pupils real large or real small? Does your child wear sunglasses even at night and try and say they are just trying to look cool? A person's eyes show the effects of the drugs they are on. If you think your child is experimenting with drugs, watch his or her eyes. Are they red all the time? Glazed? If so, there's a real good chance your child is using drugs.

Sudden bursts of anger

Has your child developed a violent side? Is he or she prone to sudden, uncontrollable fits of anger? This doesn't have to mean physically violent (though that is often the case) but can also be a teen who is always yelling or threatening people. Any of these things should be a warning sign to you that your child could be experimenting with drugs.

Lies!

If your child is experimenting with drugs, he/she will be telling lots of lies to cover this up. Teens tend to be very good at covering things up. If you start wondering whether or not your child is telling you the truth, there is a good chance that your instincts are right. Be persistent and learn what it is that they are trying to cover up. Drugs are an all-too-real possibility.

Dramatic mood swings

Does your child seem real happy one day, then terribly depressed the next day? Do your child's emotions go up and down constantly? This is often confused with 'normal' teenage behavior, but it can also be an obvious sign of drug abuse. Don't simply write it off.

Excessive money spending or money disappearing

Drugs cost money. If your child keeps coming to you needing money, or if money keeps coming up missing from your purse or your wallet, you need to have a serious talk with your child. Especially if they always seem to need \$20 or \$50 -- round amounts -- since that is often the price drugs cost.

A tip sheet for parents

- Parents, you can provide good models for your children by what you do and what you avoid doing.
- Show that you value your freedom to think and act independently -- you don't do something because everyone is doing it. This helps your children see that unwanted peer pressure can be rejected.
- Be consistent in your words and actions. For example, a phone call interrupts your dinner and you say, "Tell them I'm not home yet." The message your children hear is that it's okay to be dishonest for your own convenience.
- Demonstrate your respect for your children's lives and show concern by being a good listener.
- Be sincere, ask questions, and use a touch or a look for encouragement.
- Be cautious in using prescription or over-the-counter medicines as a quick fix for pain or stress. Your example can help counter the media messages that discomfort can be cured by chemicals.
- Be aware of how your own use of alcohol can influence children. Your children will notice how much you drink and why. Avoid using excuses for drinking, like having a rough day. Your drinking behavior tends to be the drinking behavior your children will have when they grow up.
- Talk honestly about stress and conflict in your own life. Children need to know that such struggles are a normal part of life. They have a good model when they see that you are coping with problems without relying on alcohol and other drugs.
- If you are trying to change something in your behavior -- such as quitting smoking or losing weight -- be willing to talk about what works and what doesn't.
- Show that spending time with your children is something you value and look forward to. If you are too tired or too busy, they're likely to imitate your behavior.
- Accept the role of parent as your responsibility -- let someone else be their friend.
- Make parenting a priority. Be there! Remember that teenagers need parental supervision as much as toddlers do. It's just a different kind. Know that your children are never too big for a hug, even when they are grown.

What parents can do

If you have found out for sure that your child is experimenting with drugs and alcohol, what you do next is a matter of utmost importance. Some parents shrug drug experimentation off as a phase a child goes through as they grow up. Other parents just want to deny the problem and hope it will go away on its own. But the truth is you can't ignore your child's drug problem...it will not go away on its own, it will only get worse!

Here are some suggestions on what you can do as parents if your child is using drugs or alcohol.

- You need to find out what kinds of drug your child is experimenting with. Often children will claim they are only smoking marijuana when they are really also using other drugs. Take the time to investigate matters for yourself, and find out what's really going on.
- Begin to scrutinize your child's choice of friends. If your son or daughter is experimenting with drugs, some of his or her friends are also involved. It is important to find out which of these friends are involved in this experimentation and get your child away from these influences. This is one of the most difficult things to accomplish, but it is also one of the most necessary. Bad friends corrupt good morals.

Of those that leave the Teen Challenge recovery program and end up back on drugs, one of the most common reasons is that they went back to the same old friends and environment where they used drugs before. Those that stay clean invariably find a new set of friends that encourage and support good values and wholesome fun that does not include drugs and alcohol.

- Get your kids involved in church activities. It is very important not only to get your children away from kids who are bad influences on them, but to get them around people who will have a positive impact on their life. Churches center many of their activities around the family and are often overlooked as a source for help. Students who have completed the Teen Challenge program and continue to stay off drugs often cite church activities as one reason that they are able to "stay clean."
- Get involved in your kid's life. Today's fast-paced world has taken its toll on parenting. Many parents idea of spending time with their children is sitting down and spending an hour or two watching television with them. That is not the kind of involvement your child needs! Spend quality time with your son or daughter...helping them with their homework or just sitting down each day and talking about what your child did that day. Also take the time to personally attend their activities with them. Show your children that you care about them by doing things with them. This also gives you an opportunity to see who their friends are and how they act when they are together.
- Set standards for your child. Let him or her know what you expect of them around the house, what their chores are and the penalty for not doing them. Also set standards for your child at school. Tell your child what kind of grades you expect him to achieve. And finally, give your child standards for behavior. Your child needs to know that using drugs and alcohol is unacceptable behavior. Don't be afraid to deal with your child using tough love if he or she continues to experiment with drugs or alcohol. The alternatives are much worse!
- Seek help from people who understand what you are going through. The pastor at the church your family attends is one person you can talk to about what your child is going through. Teen Challenge is another alternative for help. Teen Challenge has been helping people in New England and New Jersey for over 50 years. Contact the Teen Challenge center nearest you for help with your son or daughter's drug or alcohol problem and look for referrals to local support groups and resources. It is very important for you to remember that you are not alone!

Suggested Readings for Parents, Juveniles and Teens

- **Boundaries** by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
- **Boundaries with Kids** by Henry Cloud and John Townsend

- **Setting Boundaries with Your Adult Children** by Allison Bottke
- **Search for Significance** (student edition) by Robert McGee
- **Bringing Up Boys** by James Dobson
- **When Good Kids Make Bad Choices** by Elyse Fitzpatrick
- **How to be a Happy, Healthy Family** by Jim Burns
- **Relational Parenting** by Ross Campbell
- **On Becoming Teen Wise** by Ezzo and Buckman
- **The Seven Cries of Today's Teens** by Timothy Smith
- **The Bondage Breaker** (youth edition) by Neil Anderson
- **Every Young Man's Battle** by Stephen Arterburn
- **Wild At Heart** by John Eldredge
- **The Purpose Driven Life** by Rick Warren
- **Every Young Man, God's Man** by Stephen Arterburn
- **Sexual Integrity** by Edwin Cole
- **Not Guilty** by Jim and Barbara Dycus
- **Spirit Warriors** by Stu Webber
- **The Wounded Spirit** by Frank Peretti
- **Turning Hurts into Halos** by Robert Schuller
- **Women Who Hurt Themselves** by Dusty Miller
- **The Five Love Languages of Teenagers** by Gary Chapman
- **Mercy for Eating Disorders** by Nancy Alcorn
- **Breaking Free From Anorexia and Bulimia** by Linda Mintle, PhD

Works Cited

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