

RIA Reaching Others: Parenting Drug-Free Children



Most parents do their best to raise their children to have happy, healthy and productive lives. If children develop substance abuse problems, it can hamper their development and keep them from living up to their full potential.

Recent national surveys indicate that illegal drug use among teenagers has increased in the past few years, mainly because of a rise in marijuana use. Approximately 36 percent of high school seniors reported using marijuana in the past year. This increase may be due in part to a growing perception that marijuana is a “safe” drug, because of trends in legalizing marijuana for medical and even recreational use.

Parents are often concerned about whether their children will start or are already using drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and others, including the abuse of prescription drugs. Research has shown the important role parents play in preventing their children from starting to use drugs.

Although some parents may believe they have little or no influence on their children’s habits, a [national survey](#) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) shows otherwise, finding “teens who believe their parents would strongly disapprove of their substance use were less likely to use substances than others.” [Another study](#) found that when students trusted and felt comfortable communicating with their parents, and parents were actively involved in their children’s lives, children were less likely to use alcohol or marijuana.

As a parent, what can you do to lower the risk for alcohol and drug abuse in your child?

Build a warm and trusting relationship with your child. Research at RIA highlights the importance of parent-child relationship quality in preventing the risk for drug use. This can begin at birth. What you do may need to change as they grow, but what remains constant is the importance of being warm and caring toward your child. For example:

- ▶ Comfort and soothe them when they cry or are sad
- ▶ Follow your children’s lead when interacting with them
- ▶ Use ‘time out’ when they are young instead of spanking, yelling, threatening, etc.
- ▶ Know what is typical to expect them to do at a given age
- ▶ LISTEN when they talk
- ▶ Make time for family rituals, meal times and traditions

Teenagers and Drug Use



The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) conducts a yearly survey, [“Monitoring the Future,”](#) that measures drug, alcohol and tobacco use among students in 8th, 10th and 12th grade. Here are a few facts from the 2013 survey:

- ▶ Marijuana use is on the rise again, after declining from the 1990s until the mid-to-late 2000s. Nearly 23 percent of 12th graders used marijuana in the past month, up from 19.4 percent in 2008. More than 12 percent of 8th graders had used it in the past year.
- ▶ Prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drug abuse remains a concern, but use of opioid painkiller (such as Vicodin and OxyContin), ADHD drugs and OTC cough products declined among all grade levels.
- ▶ Alcohol use declined as well, but is still the most common substance use problem among teens. In the late 1990s, more than half (52.7 percent) of 12th graders reported drinking in the last month. In 2013, that number dropped to 39.2 percent. Despite the positive trend, the number remains unfortunately high.
- ▶ 2013 had the lowest-ever percentage of cigarette smoking since the survey began in 1975. In fact, fewer 12th-grade students smoke cigarettes (16.3 percent) than smoke marijuana (22.7 percent).
- ▶ However, the rates of e-cigarette use are on the rise. In 2011, use of e-cigarettes among 6th to 12th graders ranged from below 1 percent to 3.3 percent,

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Provide clear and high standards for your child. As the American Academy of Pediatrics reminds, the word “discipline” comes from the Latin word for “teach” or “instruct.” When you can lovingly present clear expectations to your children, they are better able to learn self-discipline and refrain from harmful behaviors.

- ▶ Make sure your rules are clear and understandable to them
- ▶ Set limits clearly and calmly
- ▶ Focus on what they do well not just on bad behavior
- ▶ Set high standards for yourself—children learn by watching what you do
- ▶ Do not send confusing messages (e.g., letting them have some alcohol at a party but telling them it is not OK to drink)

Practice positive parenting with teenagers. The [Family Checkup](#) program developed at the University of Oregon highlights parenting skills important for preventing drug use in adolescents and has some online videos about parent-adolescent communication that may be helpful. Tips include:

- ▶ Communicate calmly and clearly with your teenager
- ▶ Encourage positive behaviors on a daily basis
- ▶ Negotiate emotional conflicts and work toward solutions
- ▶ Set limits calmly when your teenager is disrespectful or defiant
- ▶ Monitor where your teen is and who he or she is with

Stay vigilant and watch for signs of possible substance use. Even in the best parenting situations, children can still fall prey to drug and alcohol use. Be aware if:

- ▶ Your teenager starts behaving differently with no obvious reason
- ▶ There is a change in your teen’s peer group
- ▶ Decline in academic performance
- ▶ Missing classes or skipping school
- ▶ Loss of interest in favorite activities
- ▶ Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- ▶ Changes in quality of relationships with family and friends

If you suspect your child is using drugs, there are many actions you can take to help him or her:

- ▶ First find out why he or she is using drugs. Three of the most common reasons are to have a good time, cope with a difficult situation or bad feelings, or peer pressure.
- ▶ If he is using mostly to have a good time, you can talk about other ways to have a good time without involving alcohol or other drugs.
- ▶ If she is using to cope with negative feelings or situations, it is best to seek professional help.
- ▶ If he is using due to peer pressure, you can help him find ways to say no to his friends or find a new social group.
- ▶ If she is a regular user, regardless of the reason, it is also best to seek professional help. Referrals may be available from your family physician or from your child’s school counselor.

Helpful links

Family checkup parenting program: <http://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup>

Booklet on preventing drug use: http://www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/preventingdruguse_2.pdf

Trends in adolescent substance use and risk perceptions: <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k13/NSDUH099a/sr099a-risk-perception-trends.pdf>

Tips for caregivers of 3- to 6-year-olds: <http://bblocks.samhsa.gov/>

Importance of preventing underage drinking: <https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/parents-who-host>

Teenagers and Drug Use

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but has increased to 6.8 percent among adolescents and 10 percent among high school students. Most importantly, a significant number of adolescents and young adults who never smoked cigarettes have tried e-cigarettes, thus raising the possibility of higher rates of nicotine exposure and a possible introduction to other drug use.

Sources: <http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/monitoring-future>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24680203>

