

Summer Is the High Time for New Teen Substance Use, *plus* Lots of Free Time for Teens who Use Already

We know that teens first experiment with marijuana and other substances more in June and July, as compared to any other part of the year. It is also a time when those who do use increase their use.

The good news is that parents can make an important difference! They still need you.

- **Talk With Your Children:** Work diligently on establishing and maintaining good communication with your teens by being available to them. Be interested and knowledgeable about their lives. Take the opportunities in the car, while making dinner, or on movie night to talk. This will make it easier to talk about the difficult issues. Ask questions and allow them to participate in the conversation and be heard. Reflect back to them what you think they said. Make your concerns known but keep your message brief. Don't give up!
- **Get Involved & Monitor Their Activities:** Kids are much less likely to have mental health and substance use problems when they have positive activities to do and when caring adults are involved in their lives. Help your kids find activities and places for these activities that are substance-free -- then keep track of where, with whom, and what your child is doing. Also, learn more about their social media use and discuss your expectations.
- **Set Rules:** It is essential to make clear rules and enforce them with consistency and appropriate disciplinary action. Clearly identify what actions you expect your teens to take because teens who know what their parents expect from them are much less likely to use substances, including alcohol.
- **Be a Role Model:** Teens learn to be adults from you. This is why it is important that parents be mindful of their own actions related to the use of tobacco, alcohol, illegal use of legal drugs, and illegal drugs. Think before you speak about others and show tolerance of differences. Teens are watching to see how you cope with stress and what you do during your leisure time so choose your words and actions wisely. When you make a mistake, show how you learn from it. Need to apologize? Be sure to once you have cooled down.
- **Help Teach Kids to Choose Friends Wisely:** Teens want to be accepted and noticed by their peers, and sometimes this can result in making unhealthy choices. Parents can be very helpful in empowering their kids to develop healthy senses of self and to set positive goals early on and stick to them. Talk about the qualities of good friends and about boundaries. Know their friends and ask about them.
- **Limit the Access Your Teens Have to Substances:** Teens use substances that are available to them. They report obtaining alcohol, cigarettes, pills and marijuana from home or from people they know. Look into your medicine cabinets and remove prescriptions. Keep cold medicines secured. Even if your teen is not interested, s/he can have peers who are. Know about vaping and what different vaping devices look like. Vaping "juices" and pods contain nicotine which is an addictive substance and harmful to the teenage brain.
- **Inform Teens About the Honest Dangers:** Discussing negative consequences impacts the decisions teens make. It is important to emphasize that substance use impacts thinking,

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emotions, relationships, academics, perceptions, their developing brains, and other bodily functions. Talk to them about addiction, their reputations and the importance of maintaining trust between you and them.

For more detailed information:

<http://www.drugfree.org/>

Have a great summer!

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