

For Immediate Release
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“Prevention is Everyone’s Business,’ Part II—What Parents Can Do”

While substance abuse prevention is important in every sector of the community, parents play the most important role in preventing substance use by their children. Children learn at an early age how to implement prevention—they learn to get in their car seats to minimize injuries in an accident, and they learn to brush their teeth to avoid getting cavities. The earlier children receive consistent messages about what is expected of them, the earlier they learn to live up to those expectations.

Believe it or not, parents have much control over what teens believe and how they act. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Parents’ drinking behavior and favorable attitudes about drinking have been positively associated with adolescents’ initiating and continuing drinking.” That means if parents make high risk drinking choices or talk about the pleasures of getting drunk, for instance, it is more likely that youth will start drinking and continue to drink in high-risk ways. The same is true in reverse—if parents consistently make healthy decisions, and talk about making healthy decisions, youth are more likely to follow suit.

The following are tools for parents to help prevent alcohol use and other risky behaviors on the part of their children:

Tool #1: Ask standard questions when your child is going out: Who will you be with? What will you be doing? Where will you be? When will you be back? It is much easier to start the routine when your child is younger, rather than waiting until there is a problem.

Tool #2: Let the youth know what behavior you expect of them when they are not in your presence. Teens will act irresponsibly more often when parents don’t talk with them about expectations and values.

Tool #3: Talk with other parents. For example, when a teen says he or she is staying at Sue’s house, call Sue’s parents to make sure this is true. It is okay for your child to know you will be checking on them from time to time—it reinforces you care about the child’s well-being. Other parents may also begin to feel comfortable calling you as well.

Communication is important, also. Young people benefit when parents talk with them about many things, including family rules for alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other risky behaviors. Youth who don’t use alcohol say their parents are a major factor in that decision. Many parents think their child doesn’t value their opinion, but the child often *is* listening, whether they show it or not.

It is never too early to start the conversation with a young child, and it is never too late to talk with a teenager. Remember that talking about healthy choices and avoiding risky behaviors reinforces a youth’s decision to stand up for his/her values and make healthy decisions. Our children are watching and listening.

Next time: “What can Community Members do?”