

CHOICES Program

Age appropriate advice

Grades 4-6

The preteen years. It's such a great time in kids' lives. They start to consider their place in the world. They become champions of justice. They begin to use complex problem-solving skills, value their friends' opinions much more, and begin to get curious about love and sex. But for a parent, it can also be a bit of a scary time as preteens also begin to question their parents' messages.

Don't take this newfound independence as a sign that you should back off about the dangers of Alcohol, Tobacco, and other drugs. In fact, when it comes to the issue of drug use, this is one of the most important times in a child's life. Increased exposure to the "gateway drugs" of tobacco, alcohol, and Marijuana put children of this age group at immediate risk. Sure, your advice may be challenged — but it's also heard. Yes, your word is no longer law — but it stays with your child much more than he or she is willing to let on.

The following tips will help you help your child live healthy and drug-free:

- **Make sure your child knows your rules — and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken.** Preteens can understand the reason for rules and appreciate having limits in place. This applies to no-use rules about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs — as well as bedtimes and homework. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
- **Act out scenes with your child where people offer her drugs.** Give her the tools that help her out of a sticky situation and it's more likely that she'll actually get out of that situation. Kids who don't know what to say or how to get away are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Let her know that she can use you as an excuse and say: "No, my mom [or dad, aunt, etc.] would kill me if I smoked a cigarette." Make sure she knows she shouldn't continue friendships with kids who have offered her drugs.
- **Tell your child what makes him so special.** Puberty can play nasty tricks with a child's self-esteem. At times, your child may move from having good feelings about himself and his life at home and school to some feelings of insecurity, doubt, and pressure. He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual — not just when he brings home an A.
- **Give your children the power to make decisions that go against their peers.** You can reinforce this message through small things such as encouraging your child to pick out the sneakers he likes rather than the pair his four friends have.
- **Base drug and alcohol messages on facts, not fear.** Kids can't argue with facts but their new need for independence may allow them to get around their fears. Also, kids love to learn facts — both run-of-the-mill and truly odd. Take advantage of their passion for learning to reinforce your message about drugs.
- **Let your kids know about the here-and-now problems associated with alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.** Preteens aren't concerned with future problems that might result from experimentation with tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. They are concerned about their appearance — sometimes to the point of obsession. If they believe drug use will impair their looks and health, they are unlikely to be tempted by these practices. Tell them about the smelly hair and ashtray breath caused by cigarettes. Make sure they know that it would be hard to perform in the school play while high on marijuana.
- **Get to know your child's friends — and their friends' parents.** Check in by phone or a visit once in a while to make sure they are giving their children the same kinds of messages you give your children about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Help children separate reality from fantasy. Watch TV and movies with them and ask lots of questions to reinforce the distinction between what is real and what is make-believe. Remember to include advertising in your discussions, as those messages are especially powerful.

What drugs could be in the preteen's world?

Tobacco, Alcohol, Ritalin, Inhalants, Marijuana.

CHOICES Program

Grades 7-9

Young teens view the world as a giant set of possibilities. While they're often excited to dive in and take on whatever comes their way, they also experience deep confusion about those experiences. They want to be independent and have adult responsibilities but they cling to the familiar for reassurance. They desperately want approval from other teens and are easily swayed by what their peer group feels is appropriate behavior. This is also the first time that kids really get to make choices that have a lasting impact — not just about their clothing for the day or what they want for lunch. In addition, young teens often experience huge changes in their bodies, emotional lives, and relationships. This is the time when many young people try Alcohol, Tobacco, and other drugs for the first time.

Keep in mind:

- Teens are twice as likely to use Marijuana as parents believe they are, and those teens are getting high in the places that parents think are safe havens — around school, at home, and at friends' houses. (Partnership Attitude Tracking Study)
- 44 percent of 8th graders report having tried alcohol. (Monitoring the Future 2004)
- 17 percent of 8th graders report trying an inhalant. (Monitoring the Future 2004)
- 28 percent of 8th graders have tried cigarettes. (Monitoring the Future 2004)

But you can help your teen stay healthy and drug-free — and beat the facts. First of all: Stay involved. Young teens may say they don't need your guidance, but they do — especially when it comes to choosing a group of friends to spend time with. Drug use starts as a social behavior. Even if your kids appear to shrug off your advice and rules, they're listening.

Keep the following tips in mind as you guide your kids through the young teen years:

- **Make sure your teen knows your rules — and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken.** Teens can understand the reason for rules and appreciate having limits in place. This applies to no-use rules about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs — as well as curfews and homework. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
- **Let your teen in on all the things you find wonderful about him.** He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual — not just when he makes the basketball team.
- **Show interest — and discuss — your child's daily ups and downs.** You'll earn your child's trust, know how to talk to each other, and won't take your child by surprise when you voice a strong point of view about drugs.
- **Tell your teen about the negative effect alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs have on physical appearance.** Teens are extremely concerned with their physical appearance. If they believe drug use will impair their looks and health, they are unlikely to be tempted by these practices. Tell them about a time you saw a friend or acquaintance get sick from alcohol — reinforce how completely disgusting it was.
- **Don't just leave your child's anti-drug education up to his school.** Ask your teens what they've learned about drugs in school and then continue with that topic or introduce new topics. A few to consider: the long-term effects that tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs have on the human body; how and why chemical dependence occurs — including the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; the impact of drug use on society — societal costs of impaired health and loss of productivity; maintaining a healthy lifestyle; positive approaches to stress reduction; or setting realistic short- and long-term goals.

What drugs could be in the preteen's world?

Tobacco, Alcohol, Ritalin, Inhalants, Marijuana, Ecstasy, Herbal Ecstasy, Cocaine/Crack, GHB, Heroin, Rohypnol, Ketamine, LSD, Mushrooms.

CHOICES Program

Grades 10-12

Talking and making choices about Alcohol, Tobacco, and other drug use are nothing new to teens. Today's teens are savvy about drug use, making distinctions not only among different drugs and their effects, but also among trial, occasional use, and addiction. They witness many of their peers using drugs — some without obvious or immediate consequences, others whose drug use gets out of control. By now, your teen has had to make tough decisions about whether he would give in to peer pressure and experiment with drugs or go against some peers and stay clean.

All of these experiences — along with messages from you, teachers, friends, the media, and entertainment sources — have guided your teen toward his or her current attitude about drugs. By age 16, kids' exposure to drugs and their attitudes toward the messages they receive from their parents are fairly firm — but this doesn't mean you should stop talking to your teen about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. By keeping the conversation going, you'll help your teen enter his adult years healthy and ready to raise the next generation of drug-free kids.

A few tips for you and your older teen:

- **Give general messages about drug use the heave-ho — your older teen needs to hear detailed and reality-driven messages.** Topics you might want to talk about with your teen include: that even trying a drug or using it occasionally can have serious permanent consequences, that anyone can become a chronic user or an addict, and the potentially deadly effects of combining drugs.
- **Emphasize what drug use can do to your teen's future.** Teens look ahead and think about their future. Discuss how drug use can ruin your teen's chance of getting into the college she's been dreaming about, landing the job she's perfect for, or joining the military and following in her father's footsteps.
- **Encourage your teen to volunteer somewhere they can see the impact drug use has on your community.** Teenagers tend to be idealistic and enjoy hearing about ways they can help make the world a better place. Help your teen research volunteer opportunities at local homeless shelters, hospitals, or victim services centers.
- **Use news reports as discussion openers.** If you see a news story about an alcohol-related car accident, talk to your teen about all the victims that an accident leaves in its wake. If the story is about drugs in your community, talk about the ways your community has changed as drug use has grown.
- **Compliment and encourage your teen for the all the things he does well and for the positive choices he makes.** Let him know that he is seen and appreciated. And let him know how you appreciate what a good role model he is for his younger brother or sister, or for other kids in the community. Teens still care what their parents think. Let him know how deeply disappointed you would be if he started using drugs.

What drugs are in the teen's world?

Tobacco, Alcohol, Ritalin, Inhalants, Marijuana, Ecstasy, Herbal Ecstasy, Cocaine/Crack, GHB, Heroin, Rohypnol, Ketamine, LSD, Mushrooms.

