

# Police: What Can Parents Do?

## Introduction

Child rearing is one of the most important tasks anyone ever performs, and the one for which there is the least preparation. Most of us learn how to be parents through on-the-job training and by following the example that our parents set.

Today the widespread use of alcohol and other drugs subjects our children, families, and communities to pressures unheard of 30 or 40 years ago. Frankly, many of us need help to deal with this frightening threat to our children's health and well-being.

Recent surveys show that we are making progress in our national battle against some drugs. Casual use is declining, attitudes are changing, and we know more about what works to prevent drug use by our young people.

As parents, we can build on that progress in our own families by having strong, loving relationships with our children, by teaching standards of right and wrong, by setting and enforcing rules for behavior, by knowing the facts about alcohol and other drugs, and by really listening to our children.

## Teaching Values

Every family has expectations of behavior that are determined by principles and standards. These add up to "values." Children who decide not to use alcohol or other drugs often make this decision because they have strong convictions against the use of these substances - convictions that are based on a value system. Social, family, and religious values give young people reasons to say no and help them stick to their decisions.

Here are some ways to help make your family's values clear:

**Communicate values openly.** Talk about why values such as honesty, self-reliance, and responsibility are important, and how values help children make good decisions. Teach your child how each decision builds on previous decisions as one's character is formed, and how a good decision makes the next decision easier.

**Recognize how your actions affect the development of your child's values.** Simply stated, children copy their parent's behavior. Children whose parents smoke, for example, are more likely to become smokers. Evaluate your own use of tobacco, alcohol, prescription medicines, and even over-the-counter drugs. Consider

how your attitudes and actions may be shaping your child's choice about whether or not to use alcohol or other drugs.

This does not mean, however, that if you are in the habit of having wine with dinner or an occasional beer or cocktail you must stop. Children can understand and accept that there are differences between what adults may do legally and what is appropriate and legal for children. Keep that distinction sharp, however. Do not let your children be involved in your drinking by mixing a cocktail for you or bringing you a beer, and do not allow your child to have sips of your drink.

**Look for conflicts between your words and your actions.**

Remember that children are quick to sense when parents send signals by their actions that it's all right to duck unpleasant duties or to be dishonest. Telling your child to say that you are not at home because a phone call comes at an inconvenient time is, in effect, teaching your child that it is all right to be dishonest.

**Make sure that your child understands your family values.**

Parents assume, sometimes mistakenly, that children have "absorbed" values even though they may be rarely or never discussed. You can test your child's understanding by discussing some common situations at the dinner table; for example, "What would you do if a person ahead of you in line at the theater dropped a dollar bill?"

**Setting and Enforcing Rules Against the Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs**

As parents, we are responsible for setting rules for our children to follow. When it comes to alcohol and other drug use, strong rules need to be established to protect the well-being of a child. Setting rules is only half the job, however; we must be prepared to enforce the penalties when the rules are broken.

**Be specific.** Explain the reasons for the rules. Tell your child what the rules are and what behavior is expected. Discuss the consequences of breaking the rules: what the punishment will be, how it will be carried out, how much time will be involved, and what the punishment is supposed to achieve.

**Be consistent.** Make it clear to your child that a no-alcohol/no-drug use rule remains the same at all times - in your home, in a friend's home, anywhere the child is.

**Be reasonable.** Don't add new consequences that have not been discussed before the rule was broken. Avoid unrealistic threats such as, "Your father will kill you when he gets home." Instead, react calmly and carry out the punishment that the child expects to receive for breaking the rule.

## **Getting the Facts**

As parents, we need to know about alcohol and other drugs so that we can provide our children with current and correct information. If we have a working knowledge of common drugs - know their effects on the mind and body, and the symptoms of their use - we can discuss these subjects intelligently with our children. In addition, well-informed parents are better able to recognize if a child has symptoms of alcohol or drug-related problems:

At a minimum, you should:

know the different types of drugs and alcohol most commonly used and the dangers associated with each;

be able to identify paraphernalia associated with each drug;

be familiar with the street names of drugs;

know what drugs look like;

know the signs of alcohol and other drug use and be alert for changes in your child's behavior or appearance.

know how to get help promptly if you suspect your child may be using alcohol and other drugs.

For current information on alcohol and other drug use, the resource section in this guide can help direct parents to clearinghouses, drug and alcohol prevention organizations, and parent groups - to name a few.

<b>Children and Alcohol</b>	<p>Parents who are clear about now wanting their children to use illicit drugs may find it harder to be tough about alcohol. After all, alcohol is legal for adults, many parents drink, and alcohol is a part of some religious observations. As a result, we may view alcohol as a less dangerous substance than other drugs. The facts say otherwise:</p> <p>4.6 million teenagers have a drinking problem.</p> <p>4 percent of high school seniors drink alcohol every day.</p> <p>Alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of death among young people 15 to 24 years of age.</p> <p>About half of all youthful deaths in drowning, fires, suicide, and homicide are alcohol-related.</p> <p>Young people who use alcohol at an early age are more likely to use alcohol heavily and to have alcohol-related problems; they are also more likely to abuse other drugs and to get into trouble with the law.</p> <p>Young people whose body weight is lower than adults reach a higher blood alcohol concentration level than adults and show greater effects for longer periods of time.</p>
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<b>Facts on Tobacco</b>	<p>We know that smokers are 10 times as likely as nonsmokers to develop lung cancer and 3 times as likely to die at early ages from heart attack. In fact, in 1985, smoking was the leading cause of early death among adults. Nicotine, the active ingredient in tobacco, is as addictive as heroin, and fewer than 20 percent of smokers are able to quit the first time they try. Despite these facts, many children use these products.</p> <p>18 percent of high school seniors are daily smokers; 11 percent smoke 10 or more cigarettes per day.</p> <p>Young people who use cigarettes are also at great risk for all other drug use.</p> <p>70 percent of all children try cigarettes, 40 percent of them before they have reached high school.</p> <p>Cigarettes contain more than 4,000 harmful substances, several of which cause cancer.</p> <p>12 percent of boys and 1 percent of girls have chewed tobacco or used snuff. Smokeless tobacco is just as addictive and harmful as tobacco that is smoked.</p>
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## **A Quiz For Parents**

**What is the most commonly used drug in the United States?**

(a) heroin (b) cocaine (c) alcohol (d) marijuana

**Name the three drugs most commonly used by children.**

**Which drug is associated with the most teenage deaths?**

**Which of the following contains the most alcohol?**

- (a) a 12-ounce can of beer
- (b) a cocktail
- (c) a 12-ounce wine cooler
- (d) a 5-ounce glass of wine
- (e) all contain equal amounts of alcohol.

**Crack is a particularly dangerous drug because it is:**

- (a) cheap
- (b) readily available
- (c) highly addictive
- (d) all of the above

**Fumes from which of the following can be inhaled to produce a high:**

- (a) spray paint
- (b) model glue
- (c) nail polish remover
- (d) whipped cream canisters
- (e) all of the above

**People who have not used alcohol and other drugs before their 20th birthday:**

- (a) have no risk of becoming chemically dependent
- (b) are less likely to develop a drinking problem or use illicit drugs
- (c) have an increased risk of becoming chemically dependent.

**A speedball is a combination of which two drugs?**

- (a) cocaine and heroin
- (b) PCP and LSD
- (c) valium and alcohol
- (d) amphetamines and barbiturates

**Anabolic steroids are dangerous because they may result in:**

- (a) development of female characteristics in males
- (b) development of male characteristics in females
- (c) stunted growth
- (d) damage to the liver and cardiovascular system
- (e) overaggressive behavior
- (f) all of the above

**How much alcohol can a pregnant woman safely consume?**

- (a) a 6-ounce glass of wine with dinner
- (b) two 12-ounce beers each day
- (c) five 4-ounce shots of whiskey a month
- (d) none

## **Answers**

(c) Because it is legal for adults and widely accepted in our culture, alcohol is the drug most often used in the United States.

Alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana. These are the "gateway" drugs, drugs that children are first exposed to and whose use often precedes use of other drugs.

Alcohol. More than 10,000 teenagers died in alcohol-related traffic accidents in 1986; 40,000 more were injured.

(e) All four contain approximately 1.5 ounces of alcohol.

(d) Small amounts of crack can be bought for as little as \$5.00. The low price makes it easily affordable to young people. In addition, crack is thought to be one of the most addictive drugs.

(e) Virtually anything that emits fumes or comes in aerosol form can be inhaled to obtain a high.

(b) Early use of alcohol and other drugs - often by age 15 or less - is strongly associated with drug-related problems such as addiction.

(a) Combining cocaine and heroin is increasingly popular as a way of trying to lessen or control bad side effects.

(f) Steroid users subject themselves to more than 70 side effects. The liver and cardiovascular and reproductive systems are most seriously affected by steroid use. In females, irreversible masculine traits can develop. Psychological effects in both sexes can cause very aggressive behavior and depression.

(d) Medical researchers have not established any safe limits for alcohol intake during pregnancy.

## **Talking With and Listening to Your Child**

Many parents hesitate to discuss alcohol and other drug use with their child. Some of us believe that our children couldn't become involved with illegal substances. Others delay because we don't know what to say or how to say it, or we are afraid of putting ideas into our children's heads.

Don't wait until you think your child has a problem. Many young people in treatment programs say that they had used alcohol and other drugs for at least two years before their parents knew about it.

Begin early to talk about alcohol and other drugs, and keep the lines of communication open.

Don't be afraid to admit that you don't have all the answers. Let your child know that you are concerned, and that you can work together to find answers. Some references that may help are listed later in this guide.

Here are some basic hints for improving your ability to talk with your child about alcohol and other drugs.

**Be a good listener.** Make sure your child feels comfortable bringing problems or questions to you. Listen closely to what your child says. Don't allow anger at what you hear to end the discussion. If necessary, take a 5-minute break to calm down before continuing. Take note of what your child is Not saying, too. If the child does not tell you about problems, take the initiative and ask questions about what is going on at school or in other activities.

**Be available to discuss even sensitive subjects.** Young people need to know that they can rely on their parents for accurate information about subjects that are important to them. If your child wants to discuss something at a time when you can't give it full attention, explain why you can't talk, set a time to talk later, and then carry through on it!

**Give lots of praise.** Emphasize the things your youngster is doing right instead of always focusing on things that are wrong. When parents are quicker to praise than to criticize, children learn to feel good about themselves, and they develop the self-confidence to trust their own judgment.

**Give clear messages.** When talking about the use of alcohol and other drugs, be sure you give your child a clear no-use message, so that the child will know exactly what is expected. For example, "In our family we don't allow the use of illegal drugs, and children are not allowed to drink."

**Model good behavior.** Children learn by example as well as teaching. Make sure that your own actions reflect the standards of honesty, integrity, and fair play that you expect of your child.

**Communication  
Tips**

Effective communication between parents and children is not always easy to achieve. Children and adults have different communication styles and different ways of responding in a conversation. In addition, timing and atmosphere may determine how successful communication will be. Parents should make time to talk with their children in a quiet, unhurried manner. The following tips are designed to make communication more successful.

*Listening*

Pay attention.

Don't interrupt.

Don't prepare what you will say while your child is speaking.

Reserve judgement until your child has finished and has asked you for a response.

*Looking*

Be aware of your child's facial expression and body language. Is your child nervous or uncomfortable - frowning, drumming fingers, tapping a foot, looking at the clock? Or does your child seem relaxed - smiling, looking you in the eyes? Reading these signs will help parents know how the child is feeling.

During the conversation, acknowledge what your child is saying - move your body forward if you are sitting, touch a shoulder if you are walking, or nod your head and make eye contact.

*Responding*

"I am very concerned about..." or "I understand that it is sometimes difficult..." are better ways to respond to your child than beginning sentences with "You should," or "If I were you," or "When I was your age we didn't..." Speaking for oneself sounds thoughtful and is less likely to be considered a lecture or an automatic response.

If your child tells you something you don't want to hear, don't ignore the statement.

Don't offer advice in response to every statement your child makes. It is better to listen carefully to what is being said and try to understand the real feelings behind the words.

Make sure you understand what your child means. Repeat things to your child for confirmation.