



Opioids—either prescription medications or an illicit drug—present one of the most serious drug crises the U.S. has ever experienced.
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In the last issue of *Employee Education Newsletters*, we addressed the problem of alcohol abuse by young workers and began a discussion on how parents can keep their kids drug and alcohol free. In this issue we continue with our series on how to raise drug and alcohol free children.

Good Parenting Prevents Drug Use

Family factors play an important role in young people's choices around drug use. Families have a strong influence on whether a child will use cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs. A solid family unit and good parental supervision have both been shown to protect children against drug use.

As previously stated in *Employee Education Newsletters*, preventing adolescent drug use is important because it is known from extensive research that kids who initiate substance use early are at greater risk of having problems with these substances later on.

Drug and alcohol abuse can lead to serious problems such as poor schoolwork, loss of friends, problems at home, and lasting legal problems. Substance abuse is a leading cause of teen death and injury related to car crashes, suicides, violence, and drowning. Even casual use of certain drugs can cause severe medical problems, such as an overdose or brain damage.

Abuse of alcohol and other drugs is a major threat to the health and well-being of teenagers. Because alcohol and drugs change the way the brain functions, specifically the areas that control decision-making and emotions, teen growth and development can be affected by their use. Teens who abuse these substances may have difficulty establishing their identity, developing relationship skills, gaining emotional

stability, and preparing for an independent and productive future.

Parenting Style

Research on the effects of parenting styles has frequently shown that parental support, monitoring, and rule-setting are associated with less drug use among children. It is clear that parents can prevent or delay their children's use of alcohol and marijuana by setting clear rules and expectations. The research further shows that parental rules work, even if relationships between parents and children seem strained during the teen years. Generally, the extremes of unsupportive, poorly defined, and combative parental relationships can be associated with high levels of drug use.

Parental Drug Use and Alcohol Abuse

One study found that teens with a parent who abuses alcohol or drugs are three times more likely to develop an abuse problem. In addition, teens whose parents believe that alcohol and drug experimentation is expected and normal are more likely to use alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Often, teens will interpret their parents' ambivalent attitude toward substance use as approval of the behavior. Teens from families with frequent conflict, physical or sexual abuse, or psychological stress are more likely to try alcohol and drugs. Without feelings of closeness, a teen may look to alcohol or drugs to compensate for emotional pain.

Parent Training

There is substantial evidence that parent education programs have an impact on drug use, and that these programs are useful strategies for

assisting families facing a high number of risk factors for harmful adolescent drug use. Behavioral parent training, family skills training, and family therapy have also been identified as effective family strengthening interventions, but these programs are often poorly attended, particularly among parents who drink and smoke more heavily.

Summary

In summary, researchers have found that good parenting can make a big difference in preventing early alcohol and drug use.

- Good parenting includes having clear family rules, knowing where your kids are and who they are with, rewarding good behavior, and having consistent and moderate discipline.
- Parents need to sit down with their children and tell them what hopes they have for their future and set clear expectations.
- Parents should set a no-drinking and no-drug-use policy and put it in writing in order to make the message clear.
- Parents should also monitor their kids and keep track of them. There should be reasonable penalties for bad behavior, and the penalties must consistently be carried out. Children need to know that if they violate rules, there will be consequences. They also need to know that if they follow the rules, they will get family recognition. This is important in reinforcing the rules.

- Parents should never give up on their standards and good parenting even if teens express anger, antipathy, or distance in response to their parents' efforts. These efforts can help blunt the influence on teens of peers, siblings, and others who use substances.

Is Your Child Using Drugs or Alcohol?

Sometimes it is difficult to tell if your teen is using alcohol or drugs. Parents may worry that their teens are involved with drugs or alcohol if they become withdrawn or negative, although these behaviors are common for teens going through challenging times. It is important not to accuse your teen unfairly, and to try to discover why your teen's behavior has changed. If you think that your teen is using alcohol or drugs, gather all the information you can and take your teen to a health professional. This will help ensure an accurate diagnosis of your teen's involvement with substances.

Resources

When looking for resources for a child in crisis, parents have unlimited access to information. A simple internet search can reveal the existence of programs and professionals that parents would not have been likely to encounter before the internet. Not only do parents now have more choices than ever before, but, more importantly, this increased availability of knowledge empowers them to take responsibility for intervening when their child is making very poor decisions. For more information and links to helpful resources, go to www.GAPrevention.com.