

THESE TIPS MAY HELP PARENTS TURN KIDS AWAY FROM DRUG USE

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Drug treatment specialists are quick to point out that parents can take action to reduce the chances that their children will become involved with drugs and alcohol.

"You don't ever get a guarantee on it," said Dr. Edward Maxwell, head of adolescent services at Charter Ridge Hospital and father of three children. "What you do is buckle down and do the best you can, and most of the time it's going to work."

To help parents do their best, the treatment specialists interviewed for this series offered these tips:

Give your children a value system that works. "Very often upper-middle-class parents seem miserable: unhappy, depressed, down all the time. So what's a kid going to think? That this other value system says, 'Let's feel good on Friday night,' so why not try it." - Maxwell.

Obey the law, including laws that have nothing to do with drugs. "If Dad has a radar detector in his car and jokes at the dinner table about a shady business deal, he's sending his kids a mixed message. He can't turn around and say, 'I don't want you to use drugs because it's against the law, and we don't break the law in this family.'" - Maxwell.

Put pressure on neighbors to stop teen-age drinking parties. "Sure it's hard (to risk offending neighbors), but one of those kids at the party may drive up on your lawn and run your daughter down." - Maxwell.

Start drug education at an early age. "Programs in schools and churches should start very early, at the preschool level. You have to condition kids with a campaign that says, 'This is not OK.' Look what we've done with smoking - grade school kids are coming home and saying it's bad." - Maxwell.

Screen your children's friends. "Kids will tell parents - and parents will believe it - that they don't have a right to choose a child's friends. But it's a parent's responsibility." - a former drug abuser.

Remember that teens often look more mature than they really are. "Parents are often so wrapped up in their own role conflicts that they find it easier to avoid conflicts with their kids and let them do what they want to do. If you have your own problems and you see this little person who's suddenly visually older and more sophisticated, it's very easy to go along and tell yourself, 'This kid needs less of me.'" - Cathy Anderson, guidance counselor at Lexington Catholic High School.

Don't dismiss drug and alcohol use as "just a phase." "When parents don't get help early, they often end up coming to us when it's too late, through the Juvenile Court system." - Denis Cambron, program director for Charterton Hospital.

Don't rely on memories of your own teen-age years to help you with your kids. "You can't assume everything is like it was when we were kids. You can't be upstairs and leave them downstairs - you've got to be downstairs with them." - Mary Ellen Blankenship, past president of the 7th District PTA.

Don't hesitate to say "no." "Sometimes 'no' deserves an explanation, and sometimes it doesn't. Once you say no, if you stick behind it and are consistent with it, then the battle is pretty much won." - James Komara, Fayette County Public Schools.

Don't be in a hurry to teach your child "social drinking." "You know when you need to teach social drinking? When a child is 21. By that time he or she will have accumulated a wealth of success in coping with other feelings." - George Ross, Possibilities Unlimited.

Be a good listener. "Kids need somebody to listen to them as they go through the joys as well as the pains of meeting (their parents') expectations. . . . But they don't necessarily need to be paid attention to - they should always have the right to express opinions, but not the right to exert those opinions." - Ross.

Let children experience the natural consequences of their actions. "They need to know the rules and know that the rules will be enforced." - Ross.

Talk with other parents. "If you start out early checking with other parents (to make sure kids are where they say they're going to be), children will know that's just something that parents do." - Myrtle Procter, Comprehensive

Care Center.

Establish close bonds early. "To expect them to come to you and talk when they're 14 is crazy when you haven't talked to them for the past eight years. I suggest having a regularly scheduled father-daughter breakfast or movie, a time that nothing interferes with, giving it the same importance you would place on a business meeting." - Mrs. Procter.

Be open with your child. "When I have kids I'm going to start when they're really young with honesty, openness, talking about anything on my mind. I'm going to read a lot of books about self-esteem. There was no real reason for me to use drugs - that's why I'm going to read the books." - a 17- year-old former drug abuser.

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