

Keeping Tabs on Teens Stops Drug Use

A national study shows marijuana use among teens drifting slightly higher in recent years. More noteworthy is the drop in the proportion of adolescents who view marijuana use as risky. Perceived risk—the risk to the user that teenagers associate with a drug—has been a leading indicator of use, both for marijuana and other drugs, and it continued to decline in 2013 among teens. This could foretell future increases in marijuana use.

The good news is that ***parents are the primary influence on adolescent behavior*** -- even if it may not always seem that way.

Early Intervention

Certain risk factors make it more likely for a child to use drugs and alcohol, and certain prevention factors make substance abuse less likely. Once parents can control risk and prevention factors, they are on the right track. Kids who show aggression at an early age display a risk factor for later drug abuse, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Parental intervention that teaches a child more suitable and positive behaviors can change that risk factor. Other risk factors include a parent who abuses drugs and a parent who is tolerant of drug use. The more risk factors present in a child's life, the more likely he will be to use drugs.

Speak With Your Child

Let your child know that you disapprove of and won't tolerate drug abuse, and talk to her about the reasons why you disapprove. When children know that their parents have strong feelings of disapproval regarding substance abuse, they are less likely to use drugs, and they will have an easier time declining use with their friends. A large majority of young teens -- 12 and 13 -- believe that their folks would strongly disapprove of substance abuse, but not quite as many older teens -- 16 and 17 -- believe their parents would strongly disapprove, according to a 2007 report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Keep sending the message that you disapprove of substance abuse throughout your child's teen years.

Be Involved

Preteens and teens might act as if they don't want you in their lives much, but they still need you. A strong parent-child bond can be a powerful preventive measure to reduce substance abuse, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), teens appreciate it when you notice and compliment them on a job well done. That can pertain to schoolwork, sports, hobbies or being a good friend. If your child comes to you with a question regarding homework, help him figure out or find the answer. That also shows you want to be part of his life. Keep this up as your child grows, because parents tend to slack off a bit in that area as their teen gets older, according to the SAMHSA study.

Know the Signs

If your child starts using drugs, burying your head in the sand and denying there's a problem is the wrong approach. You need to be on top of the situation, and that starts by recognizing the signs of substance abuse. Possible signs a teen is using drugs include missing school frequently or having a sudden drop in grades, low energy, a neglected appearance, an

obsession with privacy that includes not telling you where he is going, and sudden requests for money without telling you what it's for. You also might notice money or expensive items missing from your home. If you suspect your child is using drugs, insist on inspecting his room, his backpack and any of his other personal belongings.

A Word on Girls

Traditionally, parents worried more about boys and substance abuse, but girls are catching up and are surpassing boys for some types of substances, such as prescription drugs and methamphetamines, according to the National Institutes of Health. Once girls start drinking and using drugs, they are more likely to become dependent on them. Mothers need to be especially aware of risk and prevention factors with their daughters because mothers are most likely to positively influence them, according to a 2009 study by the National Institutes of Health. Prevention exercises taught to mothers who participated in the study included teaching communication methods, how to monitor activities, how to build a child's self-esteem and how to establish rules and punishments regarding drug use.



From the desk of Preble Social Worker, Kelly Rowe