



## *Stopping the madness before it starts: Things you can do to prevent your child from experimenting with alcohol and drugs*

By Christina Rak-Samson, BA

How do I prevent my child from experimenting with drugs or alcohol? This is a sensitive area for many, but there are several things that can be done to help reduce the early onset of experimentation by your child.

Research has confirmed that kids are less likely to get into trouble when a responsible adult is looking out and watching over them. For many, it is not always possible to be home with their kids after school, but there are certainly other actions that can be taken to ensure your child is spending their time constructively. Here are some suggestions:

Make sure to stay connected, leave notes and call to check in on a regular basis.

Sign them up for after school programs, sports, clubs, jobs, youth groups etc. The more time they are busy with at positive activity, the less time they have to hang out and do nothing and get involved with drugs.

If your child has to be home, make sure they are working on things such as homework and chores and establish a routine to keep them busy.

Sooner or later most children will be offered drugs, and will have to make a conscious decision to accept or reject them. They will be faced with this decision numerous times before they grow out of adolescence; here are a few guidelines to help your child:

- Ask questions and make sure to know at all times where your children are, who they are spending time with, and how you may reach them. Get to know their friends and their parents as well.



- Connect with your child by doing things together as a family and take advantage of the time that you do get to spend together. Share a meal together on a regular basis.
- Establish clear rules and expectations about drugs. Talk to them about your expectations and concerns. Remember to have conversations and not lectures.

- Unite your family to take a stand against using drugs by using strong family beliefs and values and explain there are many healthier ways to enjoy life and fix problems.
- Be a role model drop any baggage you may be carrying from the past. Don't allow mistakes from the past prevent you from helping your children in the present.

Children go through many obstacles navigating through their adolescence. One important thing to remember is that they need you to help guide them even if they "act" like they don't care. You play an important role in helping to prevent your child from using drugs or alcohol. The world of drugs and alcohol can be very scary, but communicating with your child about it does not have to be. Knowledge is power and the more you and your child know about drugs and alcohol and the harmful effects, the safer and smarter you both will be.

Here are some helpful sites...

- <http://www.drugfree.org/Parent>
- <http://www.communityprevention.net/>
- <http://www.kidsagainstdrugs.com>

## All About Developmental Assets

Developmental Assets are concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising successful young people. These assets have the power during critical adolescent years to influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults.

The Developmental Asset framework was developed by the Search Institute, a nonprofit organization on a mission to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. They categorize assets into two groups of 20.

External assets are the positive experiences young people receive from the world around them.

These 20 assets are about supporting and empowering young people, about setting boundaries and expectations, and about positive and constructive use of young people's time.

External assets identify important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, and youth organizations can play in promoting healthy development.

The twenty internal assets identify those characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive internal growth and development of

young people. These assets are about positive values and identities, social competencies, and commitment to learning.

The internal Developmental Assets will help these young people make thoughtful and positive choices and, in turn, be better prepared for situations in life that challenge their inner strength and confidence.

In this and future issues of *Parentally Speaking* we plan to highlight a specific Developmental Asset and give parents concrete suggestions to foster the development of this at home.

If you wish to learn about SI's Developmental Assets yourself, please visit [www.search-institute.org/assets/](http://www.search-institute.org/assets/)

### Developing External ASSET # 1: Family Support

"Kids feel loved and supported in their family."

- Give more hugs and verbal reinforcement. Don't assume that your kids know how much you love them. Tell them.
- Let your love for your children show in the way you look at them, the words you say, your home of voice, and your body language.
- It's not true that all kids want their parents to stop hugging or kissing them once they become teenagers. Ask your children to tell you what feels comfortable for them, and respect their boundaries.
- Eat at least one meal together every day.
- Set aside at least one evening per week for family activities. Brainstorm as a family things you might like to do, then agree on which ones to try. Be open to ideas from all family members, and be willing to share your children's interests.
- Spend time with each of your children individually. Try to make this a daily event- ten minutes after school, a half-hour in the evening, an hour on Saturday morning. Let them know that your time together is important to you, too.
- Talk with your kids about what would make your home more comfortable and inviting for them and their friends. Take steps to address any concerns.
- Be loving towards yourself and your spouse or partner. Children learn to love by example.
- Be your children's biggest fan.

## Developing Your Parenting Style *by Alison Birnbaum*

Just as your children change and grow, your parenting style can change and grow with them. In fact, the most successful parents I know report that their style matures as their children mature. And one of the most important transition periods for both you and your children is the graduation from tween to teen.

Let's first think about the developmental differences between tweens and teens so that we can match our "signals" to their "receivers."

### Parenting your tween (ages 9-12)

Tweens are just beginning to become capable of self-awareness. They are slow to take individual responsibility for their actions, and their thinking is more concrete, less abstract. Because their thinking is more black and white, our parenting must echo their abilities. When a tween is in trouble and you ask, "why did you do that?" quite often they answer "because someone else told me to." Parents who are hoping for a deeper response don't realize that their child just may not be capable of thinking more deeply.

Of course, one of our jobs as parents is to teach our children how to stretch their thinking and there are many opportunities to do this. However, as long as the child is dwelling in the world of black and white, we must match our directions to their abilities. This means:

1. Make easy-to-follow rules with easy-to-follow consequences (positive and negative).

2. Manage conflict without allowing emotions to flood interactions.

I knew a mother and a tween daughter who were locked in a difficult stage. Whenever they fought (which was frequent), the mother broke down in tears. This was followed by a storm of anger on both sides. The mother decided to make some changes. First, she worked to maintain her calm. Next, she told her daughter clearly what behavior was expected from her, and what consequences would occur if that behavior wasn't followed, as well as what consequences would occur if that behavior was followed. The daughter's behavior changed in response to healthy, structured parenting.

### Parenting your teen

Teens are capable of understanding the world in more abstract terms. They are gaining self awareness and are beginning to see differences between themselves and others. Their world view transitions from black and white to glorious color. Recently a 19-year-old told me that he was completely shocked to realize that "my parents are people, living their own lives."

Our parenting job with teens is a bit more abstract. We echo our teens' development by being part coach and part appreciative audience. We are watching them construct their lives and we want to give them enough freedom to make some of their own choices. But just because they are a bit more in charge, we can't give up our obligation to provide just enough of the "black and white" guidance to give them structure

in case the structure they are developing for themselves fails.

The same directions that we gave them as tweens are still necessary:

1. Make easy-to-follow rules with easy-to-follow consequences (both positive and negative).
2. Manage conflict without allowing emotions to flood interactions.

However, for teens, we add touches of color, particularly in the way we listen to and understand their point of view. We can talk abstractly about how we arrived at our decisions, and ask them to be more self aware. The great joy of parenting a teen is in our ability to shift our approach according to need. If we are able to effectively parent "in color" and in black and white, we can help them develop depth and also help keep them safe.

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## **Make Clear Rules ... and Enforce Them**

Would it surprise you to learn that parents' permissiveness is a bigger factor in teenage drug use than is peer pressure? If you let your child know up front that you don't approve of using tobacco or illegal drugs, or underage drinking, your child is less likely to use those substances.

Making rules, explaining the need for them, and enforcing them consistently are important. Parents need to establish regularly enforced rules to guide their children in developing daily habits of self-discipline. Research shows that parents who have either very

harsh rules or no rules at all are more likely to have children who are at greater risk for drug-taking behavior. Parents who have a warm relationship with their children, while maintaining rules for behavior, can teach children self-discipline.



The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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