



Keeping Teens Off Drugs

Thousands of children are returning to school this time of year and many parents will at one time or another during the course of the school year wonder if their child will be exposed to, invited to or pressured into using alcohol or other drugs. Unfortunately, research shows that it is likely that your child will be exposed to illicit drugs and alcohol between the ages of 12 -17. Does that mean your child will inevitably at least experiment with either drugs or alcohol? No.

What Can a Parent Do?

Two key questions for a parent to ask themselves is 'Will my son or daughter make the right decisions when it comes to using drugs or alcohol?' and 'Have I taken the time to talk with, listen to and be involved in my child's life?'. Parents play a crucial role in their child's decision not to use drugs and they are the most important influence in their kids' lives. Two-thirds of youth ages 12-17 say losing their parents' respect and pride is one of the main reasons they do not smoke, drink or use drugs.



Keeping the lines of communication open, being informed and setting guidelines are some of the best forms of prevention available. Engaging your child

in discussions about friends, activities, classes, etc. is very important as is being able to listen to what they are saying without being critical or judgmental. Staying curious and allowing time to talk with your child is actually giving you information on what is going on in their world. Paying attention to their mood, what they are saying about their friends, what sort of things are they doing in their spare time, how they re-



spond to problem situations and how they perceive themselves may be signs of how well your child may handle a situation that involves drugs or alcohol.

Is there a Problem?

So, what if, despite your attempts to communicate effectively with your child, you still suspect that he/she is using drugs or alcohol? There is no single warning sign, however some signs to look for include: changes in friends, negative changes in schoolwork, missing school or declining grades, increased secrecy about possessions or activities, use of in-

cense, room deodorant, or perfume to hide smoke or chemical odors, subtle changes in conversations with friends, e.g. more secretive, using coded language, change in clothing choices, increase in borrowing money, evidence of drug paraphernalia such as pipes, rolling papers, etc., evidence of use of inhalant products (such as hairspray, nail polish, correction fluid, common household products): rags and paper bags are sometimes used as accessories, bottles of eye drops, new use of mouthwash or breath mints, and missing prescription drugs – especially narcotics and mood stabilizers.

Though some of these warning signs may be present in your child, it does not mean that they are definitely abusing drugs or alcohol. There are many other causes for some of these behaviors. The stage of development that your child is going through is even a valid reason for many of these behaviors to exist. On the flip side of that, do not ignore the warning signs of teenage drug or alcohol abuse. If six of these signs are present for a period of time, you should talk to your child and seek some professional help.



Berrien County Health

Department:
Preventing Disease,
Prolonging Life and
Protecting the
Health of the
Community.



Back to School!

Although August marks the end of summer break for students, there is still much fun to be had! The Berrien County Health Department wants you to stay safe as you enjoy the end of summer, and get prepared for school. This month we will provide you with information on immunizations, hearing and vision screening, head lice, healthy eating and physical activity, and depression/mental health. For more information about any of these topics, **please call the health department at 926-7121.**

Tips for parents:

- Set rules and make sure your teen knows that drugs are unacceptable.
- Praise and reward good behavior, and set consequences for bad behavior.
- Know where your teen is and what she's doing when you're not around. Teens who are unsupervised are more likely to engage in risky behaviors.
- Keep your teen busy with after school activities and sports. Teens who are involved in activities are less likely to use drugs.
- Occasionally check in to make sure your teen is where he says he will be.
- Get to know your teen's friends and their parents.
- Spend time with your teen, and talk to them about what they're doing and what you expect of them.



For more information call the health department at 926-7121.

Special thanks to Kerri Teachout for her help with this article!

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor

769 Pipestone
P.O. Box 706
926-7121

M-139 Office
2106 S. M-139
927-5623

School Based
870 Colfax Ave
925-4500

Niles

1205 N. Front St.
684-2800

Three Oaks

21 N. Elm
756-2008

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