

Underage alcohol and other drug use is illegal. It's also dangerous, evidenced by the countless thousands of automobile accidents, drownings, murders and suicides linked to alcohol and other drug use.

For these and other reasons, preventing underage alcohol and other drug use has become a priority for schools, communities and workplaces across the nation. While prevention efforts target underage youths, they benefit everyone in the form of safer highways and reduced accident-related costs. And because young people who choose not to use alcohol or other drugs are more likely to avoid tragedy, so too are their friends and loved ones spared grief.

While there is no single definition of prevention, there is general agreement among prevention professionals on the overall goal of prevention, which is to foster a climate in which:

- Alcohol use is acceptable only for people of legal age;
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs and other abusable substances such as gasoline or aerosols are used only for their intended purposes; and
- Illegal drugs are not used at all.

To achieve this goal, adults in the home should model appropriate behavior, set clear standards of right and wrong, enforce consequences for inappropriate behavior, get involved in children's lives, and listen, really listen, to what children have to say. This pamphlet provides some guidelines to help accomplish these important tasks.

Communicate values openly

Talk about why values such as honesty, self-reliance and responsibility are important, and talk about the role values play in helping us make good decisions. Explain how each decision builds on previous decisions as one's character is formed and how a wise decision makes the next decision easier. Instead of watching TV during dinner, try talking about these values in the context of hypothetical or real-life situations.

Recognize how your actions affect the development of your child's values

Simply stated, children copy their parents' behavior. Children whose parents smoke, for example, are more likely to become smokers. Evaluate your own use of tobacco, alcohol, prescription medicines and even over-the-counter drugs. Consider how your attitudes and actions may be shaping your child's choice about whether to use alcohol or other drugs.

Look for conflicts between your words and your actions

Children should understand and accept that there are differences between what adults and children may do legally and appropriately. Keep that distinction sharp. If you drink, don't involve your children in your drinking by asking them to bring you a beer, *and don't allow children to have sips of your drink*. Remember that children are quick to sense when parents send mixed messages. It's like telling your child to say that you're not home when a phone call comes at an inconvenient time. That behavior, in effect, teaches a child that it's OK to be dishonest. The same is true about telling

children that no-use for those under 21 is the house policy and then allowing them "just one sip" of wine or beer on a special occasion.

Set and stick to the rules regarding alcohol and other drug use

Use of illicit drugs is illegal for anyone, and use of alcohol by underage youths is illegal. There is no gray area here. When it comes to alcohol and other drug use, the rules must be clear, and realistic consequences for violating them must be enforced. Here are more guidelines for effective prevention:

- ***Be specific.*** Explain what the rules are and what behaviors are expected. Discuss the consequences of breaking the rules, what the punishment will be, how it will be carried out, how much time will be involved, and what will be accomplished by the punishment.
- ***Be consistent.*** Make it clear that zero-tolerance for alcohol and other drug use is a constant — at home, at a friend's — anywhere.
- ***Be reasonable.*** Don't add consequences that were not discussed before a rule was broken. Avoid unrealistic threats. React rationally.
- ***Become involved.*** Join community groups and work with parents and other adults who support zero-tolerance.
- ***Don't leave youths unsupervised for weekends*** or for overnight events.
- ***Know the activities*** and social groups of your children's friends.
- ***Educate youths*** about how to stand up to peer pressure.