



## Keeping Kids Drug Free

The best way to help keep your family drug-free is to understand the factors contributing to substance abuse and to make it a topic of regular family discussion. Teens have an alarming lack of knowledge about drugs and addiction, particularly in the case of heroin. Their school-based drug prevention education is not sufficient by itself. Some important things to know are:

- Teens and adolescents are particularly at risk for substance abuse during transition times or times of change:
  - Moving from middle school to high school or high school to college
  - Changes in relationships: his/her best friend moves away and he/she has to find a new social circle
  - Your son or daughter didn't make the team that all of his/her friends made
- Mental health issues and substance abuse many times go hand in hand as youth use substances to "self-medicate" in order to feel better.
- Prescription pain pill abuse increases the risk of heroin abuse. Prescription pain pill abuse may start with medications prescribed for sport injuries or available in the household medicine cabinet.
- 25% of those who try heroin become addicted; of those who become addicted 50% will eventually die of an overdose.
- 90% of addictions start in the teen years. You can cut the risk in half by talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol.

### When talking to your adolescent or teen about drugs:

- Promote conversation about other topics to make a connection with your child. Kids and parents who talk regularly and openly stand a better chance of remaining drug-free.
- Make sure to discuss risk taking and decision making in areas other than drugs.
- Talk to them about times they've made healthy choices and reinforce those behaviors and the thinking that led to positive outcomes.
- Make sure they understand that you know they may be offered drugs.
- Offer them suggestions for refusal and role play them. Make it clear that you are their ally, and that there are serious consequences for drug abuse, physically /mentally/emotionally to them, and also financially, socially, legally, and in your household. Discuss what some of those consequences could be, both short and long term.
- Don't lecture. Start a conversation. Ask if they've ever been offered a drug, or comment on an incident in the news or on a television show. Listen to what they tell you without judgment and with compassion.
- Discuss any family history of addiction and or/mental health issues. Youth need to know any risks that are in their families.
- Brainstorm ways to handle stress and the management of mental health issues without self-medicating.