

What Can A Parent Do In The Fight To Have A Drug-Free Child

What Can A Parent Do?

The first thing a parent can do in the fight to have a drug-free child is learn about the kind of drugs kids abuse. This will put you in a good position to have frank, open discussions with your children to impress upon them that they are being sold a bill of goods by the drug culture; that they are being led to believe that drugs are "cool" when in fact they represent a tremendous health hazard. Armed with the proper information, you can give your kids the help they need to say "no" to drugs.

It's important for you to encourage your children to get involved in activities that can give them a 'natural' high. Sports, recreational, religious and volunteer activities can be real substitutes for drugs. It's important for both you and your children to discuss rules of behavior and to set clear and distinct limits they can understand.

It's also crucial that you participate. Form groups with other concerned parents. Join the PTA. Invite drug counselors to meetings. Talk with school superintendents, principals, coaches, church people, physicians and local politicians to make sure that everyone is not only aware of the drug problems but they are responsive to them. If we can stop drug abuse at the experimental stages we'll be getting at the problem before it gets a grip on our kids.

Gateway Drugs *Alcohol, Tobacco and Marijuana*

Gateway drugs are those drugs people are first exposed to and experiment with. Traditional gateway drugs are alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana.

The significance of gateway drugs is that most people with a drug dependence began their cycle of addiction by experimenting with a gateway drug. While not everyone who tries alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana becomes addicted to drugs, most addicts began their habits with one of these drugs.

Recognizing Drug Use *Signs and Symptoms*

There are many signs and symptoms that go along with substance use and abuse. The following list describes some of the changes you may see take place. In and of themselves, the symptoms may not mean a thing. However, if you see several of them, consider it a warning flag and seek further help. It is important to stress that these are possible but not conclusive signs of drug use.

Physical Symptoms

- Acting intoxicated
- Bloodshot or red eyes, droopy eyelids
- Imprecise eye movement
- Wearing sunglasses in inappropriate times
- Abnormally pale complexion
- Change in speech patterns and vocabulary patterns
- Repressed physical development
- Sudden appetite, especially for sweets
- Unexplained weight loss or loss of appetite
- Neglect of personal appearance, grooming

Behavioral Changes

- Unexplained periods of moodiness, depression, anxiety, or irritability
- Strongly inappropriate overreaction to mild criticism or simple requests
- Decreased interaction and communication with others
- Preoccupation with self; less concern for the feelings of others
- Loss of interest in previously important things such as hobbies and sports
- Loss of motivation and enthusiasm
- Lethargy, lack of energy and vitality
- Loss of ability to assume responsibility
- Need for instant gratification
- Changes in values, ideas, and beliefs
- Change in friends, unwillingness to introduce friends to family
- Violating curfews
- Having large sums of money

Social Changes

- Decline in academic performance; drop in grades
- Reduced short-term memory, concentration and attention span
- Loss of energy, motivation and interest in school activities
- Frequent tardiness and absenteeism
- Less interest in participation in classes and meetings
- Sleeping in class or meetings
- Untidy appearance, dress and personal hygiene
- Slow to respond, forgetful, apathetic
- Increased discipline/behavior problems
- Change in peer group
- Disappearance of money or items of value

For additional information on drugs and their effects, visit the following web sites.

Office of National Drug Control Policy
www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/

DARE America
www.dare.org

Family Education Network
www.familyeducation.com

Partnership for a Drug Free America
Drug-Free Resource Net
www.drugfreeamerica.org

Street Drugs
www.streetdrugs.org

www.theantidrug.com