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Ten Prevention Practices You May Not Have Considered

Parents and other caring adults play a crucial role in keeping kids from abusing substances. You probably know all the basics: monitor where your kids are after-school, no locked bedrooms, etc. But surely a problem as big as this deserves deeper thoughts and more expansive practices! Consider adding the following ten ideas to your list of parenting practices...



1. First and foremost, you have to set a good example for the children in your life. Of course, if you have a substance abuse problem, get help. But also be careful about sending a more subtle message that drugs—a glass of wine, prescription medicine, diet pills—are an easy solution to a problem or even an integral part of a fun time. And be aware of the substance abuse opportunities in your own home—for your kids and their friends. Know exactly what alcohol, prescription drugs, and other potentially risky substances you have in the house, so you'll know as soon as some is gone.
2. Kids need to be armed with scripts for saying no. Kids should practice what they would say in their own words. Kids need to know that they may have to repeat themselves in response to peer pressure, and if the situation becomes uncomfortable, that, in and of itself may be reason to leave.
3. Young people need to have a reasonable plan for saying “no.” Parents too often only teach their kids to be a hero: Say NO, condemn the activity and the participants and immediately leave the party. From a parent’s perspective, that is the best outcome. But is it realistic? Young people need to have a way to say no in ways they might really say it—otherwise, refusal isn’t going to feel like a real option when the time comes.”
4. When talking about substances, set rules with clear limits and consequences. Kids need to hear more than just “drugs are bad.” Be specific: tell children that they are not to attend any parties where alcohol will be served. Moreover, if they do, they will be grounded or whatever your meaningful punishment will be. These rules have to be reasonable and consistently enforced.

5. Kids need to be recognized and praised for following drug-related rules. For example, it is a big deal if a teen leaves a party when he or she figures out that friends are drinking. The child ought to be rewarded.
6. Family rules about drug use are more effective when they are in the context of broader family values. Does your family have a mission statement? Do you have regular times like weekly meetings in which you talk about what is important to your family? It's not too late to begin these practices. Consider making a note in your calendar or otherwise to discuss drugs once each month or so.
7. Find "teachable moments" in the media and everyday life to talk about substance abuse. Point out alcohol, drug, or tobacco-related situations portrayed on the shows you watch or the stories you read. Use news headlines as a discussion point. Make sure you give your kids the chance to voice what they think about drugs in the media, too. The more often a child says out-loud that drugs are bad, the more likely he or she will maintain that position.
8. Let your child know that you will always help them out of a tricky situation: lovingly, without compromising their "cool." And let them know you'll be willing to help friends who get stuck in a bad situation, too. Young people have enough to worry about when they are taking a stand, make sure that they are confident and know that they have your support.
9. Don't be afraid of answering "Did you do drugs?" —whatever that answer is. Your kids deserve an honest answer. Moreover, your answer gives you a great chance to show your child that you understand the forces that encourage drug use. And you can talk about the hazards from personal experience. And don't worry, part of your story can and should stay private.
10. Don't forget the role of grandparents. More than half of grandparents spend time with their grandkids weekly or bi-weekly. Their stories can be important, too. And grandparents can help implement all of the protective factors we've been reviewing.

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