



Maine Source

Mission: A collaborative community effort to increase overall community capacity for advocacy, education, guidance, and resources for families to promote drug and alcohol-free youth

Spring 09 Issue

How to Set Limits for Your Teens

We know we need to be our teen's parents, not their friends, but it's difficult to invite the resentment of the children we love. Some of us are so afraid of them slipping away that we risk losing them forever by not setting limits on potentially dangerous behavior. But teen brains are still developing in the areas governing judgment and impulse control. They need caring adults to provide guidance and rules. While teens without rules appear glamorous to peers, and they sometimes flaunt a "nobody tells me what to do" attitude, behind closed doors they are often sad that "nobody cares what I do or what happens to me."

Rules make kids feel secure, help them resist peer pressure, and are key to substance abuse prevention.

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America (www.drugfree.org/parent/protectingyourkids) provides encouragement to anxious parents. "Rules don't alienate kids. Rules about what's acceptable – from obeying curfews to calling in to tell you where they are – make children feel loved and secure. Rules are a key ingredient in substance abuse prevention," the article says. While teens, especially older ones, aren't really "children," they are still in need of parental rules as the only power strong enough to beat peer pressure.

As the article points out, if your teen knows she can always blame you (for stopping the "fun") she will have an excuse to fall back on, without losing face, when tempted or urged by friends to make bad decisions.

To set limits with teens:

Don't undermine your rules by overreacting with harsh and unenforceable punishments when rules are broken. Instead, when you first tell your child about a new rule, discuss the consequence for breaking it.

Punishments should be reasonable and related to the violation; for example, if you catch your son smoking with friends, you might ground him, depriving him of their company for two weeks. With fair and guaranteed consequences, limits earn respect.

Don't issue punishments when you're upset, and don't come up with new punishments for a rule violation without discussing them. You want to give your child every chance to weigh the predictable consequences of violating your trust. They need to know that "if I do X, Mom and Dad will do Y." Keep it simple and they'll keep it in mind even when the pressure's on.

Don't allow hours of unstructured, unsupervised time after school. If no adult is home, encourage your teen to get involved with youth groups, arts, sports, music, community service and clubs.

-continued on Page 2-

Nicotine: Gateway Drug is Not a Myth

Most parents disapprove of smoking cigarettes because of the long-range risk of cancer and emphysema, but there's a short-range danger that's just as real. Nicotine addiction is surprisingly difficult to overcome and smoking is a trigger to use other drugs.

When teens smoke, they break the law, and psychologically, the more routine this law-breaking becomes, the easier it is to regard laws about alcohol and other drugs as unimportant.

It's no myth: There is a high correlation between smoking cigarettes with using other drugs.

Parents should also know that tolerating teen drinking has the same effect, only more so, since alcohol impairs judgment and impulse control and makes it far likelier that teens will do something they ordinarily would not. Plus, being in the company of others who are comfortable breaking the law also makes it likelier a teen will be encouraged to cross the next limit.

Bottom line: Teens may think that cigarettes and alcohol "aren't really drugs" and are "no big deal." Parents know better, and should say so.

FAST FACT: Teens + Tobacco

Nearly all first use of tobacco occurs before high school graduation. So if adolescents don't start smoking by age 18, odds are they never will. For those who do experiment with cigarettes, new research shows teens can get hooked on nicotine more quickly than adults by extremely low levels of tobacco.

From the American Cancer Society "How to Fight Teen Smoking"

www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_14_How_to_Fight_Teen_Smoking.asp

Member of:



Community Anti-Drug
Coalitions of America

How to Set Limits for Your Teens (continued from pg. 1)

Parents tend to worry more about after-dark activities, but research shows that adult supervision after school is a key factor in substance abuse prevention. Teens value freedom and unstructured time, so a logical punishment for violating the adult supervision rule might be loss of a parent-free activity such as a trip to the movies.

Make clear your disapproval of your child using alcohol or marijuana. Again, research shows when parents make it

clear they have no tolerance for any drug use, the chances for substance abuse now or later in life are reduced.

Set limits, anticipate trigger situations, and be fair, firm and consistent in enforcing your rules. Teens will almost certainly complain and tell you that nobody else's parents are as strict. To which you can say, "I don't believe that's so, but if it is, I feel sorry that their parents don't treasure them as much as I do you." Your teen may be embarrassed or annoyed, but he'll also be secretly reassured.

Could Your Teen Be Using?

You know your teen has a problem if he or she has trouble with family members, school authorities, a boss, or with the police due to drinking or drug use. You can assume it's likely your teen has a problem if you find drug paraphernalia such as pipes or rolling papers, if your liquor cabinet is suspiciously depleted, or if you're missing prescription stimulants, painkillers or tranquilizers.

But what if it's not that obvious? While no symptom or handful of symptoms are definitive, the following are reasons to talk candidly with your teen about drugs and alcohol, if you haven't already.

Has your teen recently changed his or her group of friends, and not, in your mind, for the better? Is he more careless than usual in grooming, or has he lost interest in activities he used to enjoy? Has she missed school or gotten poorer grades?

Is he secretive about his personal possessions, friends, or conversations? Does she seem guilty when questioned about where she's been, or does she lie about it?

Has he exhibited dramatic mood or personality changes without a reason you can discern? Does she seem more sluggish or run-down, or make excuses to not attend family events? Does he use secretive or coded language with friends when you're around?

Does she use incense, air freshener, or perfume (perhaps to mask chemical or smoke odors)? Has he started using eye drops (to hide bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils)? Does she come home from school or social events smelling of mouth-wash or breath mints (to cover up the smell of smoking or drinking)? Have you found rags or paper bags around (sometimes used with inhalants such as correction fluid, hairspray, nail polish remover, etc.)? Has he taken or spent more money without a reasonable explanation of where it's going?

Whether you're seeing one possible symptom or many symptoms, don't wait. Even if your confidence is restored, take this opportunity to remind your teen that using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs is not OK and that you're always available to help. For additional assistance, consult a school social worker, counselor, or a healthcare provider.



Our **Who Knew?** social norms marketing campaign to correct the misperception that everyone drinks or uses drugs continues at the three Maine Township High Schools. The campaign uses posters to educate students that most teens are making healthy choices.

Survey results* show that 86% of students prefer to date a non-smoker.

Since February is Heart Healthy Month, we've displayed posters in the high schools about smoking. Ask your teens if they've seen the posters in school and what they think of them.

It might be an opportunity to talk about their attitudes on smoking and drinking.

"Kids really want to have discussions with their parents on important issues," says Richard Catalano, Ph.D., professor and director of the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington's School of Social Work. Dr. Catalano, quoted on the website www.drugfree.org, said that "the overwhelming majority of kids would rather talk to their parents than their friends." Surprisingly, "even kids who are involved with alcohol and other drugs wish they were having those conversations with their parents."

*Student Use & Perception Survey, March 2008. N=4307

We appreciate your interest in protecting our youth and providing them the quality of life they deserve. To make a financial or in-kind donation, or to volunteer your time or talent, please contact us. For a complete list of our partners and meeting dates, see our web site at www.mcyaf.com. Watch for our newly redesigned website coming soon!

MCYAF: Margaret Polovchak, Director
1000 Executive Way, Des Plaines, IL 60018
847-858-7090
margaret@mcyaf.com

MaineSource Newsletter
Editor: Mary Wynn Ryan
Designer: Ana Holthouse
Communications Coordinator: Cheryll DeYoung

Paid for in part by grants from the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Illinois Department of Human Services