Preventionists' Guide for Parents

Substance Abuse Prevention . . .
"helping children and young adults
make healthy decisions"

BOULDER COUNTY
PREVENTION/INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The Boulder County Prevention/Intervention Program is a multi-agency partnership that provides prevention, intervention, and crisis intervention services to middle and high students and their families in the Boulder Valley School District. Partner membership includes:

Boulder County Public Health
Boulder Valley School District
City of Boulder
Mental Health Partners, Inc.

DEAR PARENTS:

The goal of the school-based Boulder County Prevention/Intervention Program is to prevent and intervene in unhealthy, unsafe adolescent behavior. Each of us, as program staff, has a master's degree in the helping professions and at least four years of experience working with teens. One primary risk behavior that we address with kids we work with is drug / alcohol use. We are deeply aware of how important it is to work hand-in-hand with you -- their parents. The **Prevention Specialists' Guide for Parents** is intended to further this partnership. Through 20 years of providing services in the Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley schools, we have accumulated many resources which can be helpful to you in teaching your children to make healthy decisions. Included in this guide are recommendations which the parents we have worked with have found most useful. This information, *along with your patience and ability to hear what your child is saying*, will be beneficial in keeping your child healthy. Although guidebooks for parents are becoming more available, **Prevention Specialists' Guide for Parents** is unique in that it is compact, provides quick and easily used guidelines, and links you to more extensive resources, if needed. The intent of this guidebook is to give you the benefit of our experience so that you can better prepare your child to make healthy decisions. We ask that if you have any additional tips you think might be of help to other parents, please pass them along to us. We would like to thank, and at the same time draw your attention to, the sources which have provided much of the material in this guide. Christine Denning, former prevention/intervention specialist at Boulder High School; John Lewis, and Chris King created a resource guide for parents of Boulder High students: *Link Lines*. Some information was also drawn from *To Parents-From Parents*, a handbook from New Trier High School in Illinois. *A Parents' Guide to Substance Abuse Prevention* by the Circle of Concern Consortium is available to all parents by calling 720-488-1700.

Parenting is a difficult endeavor. There are times when having a partner can help. Our staff, along with school assignments and phone numbers, is listed on the back cover, along with other local resources you may need.

GUIDE CONTENTS

The Challenge for Parents
The Parent Awareness Test
Hosting a Party
The “Privacy” Debate
When Teens Go Out
When Parents are Away - Things They Can Do
It’s Only a Cigarette, a Beer, a Joint!
Parent Power
Warning Signs
Top Ten Tips for Parents
Provide a “Safe Place”?
Setting the Limits: An Exercise in Courage
Communicating with other Parents
Driving Contract
Boulder County Prevention/Intervention Staff Directory

THE CHALLENGE FOR PARENTS . . .

Many parents mistakenly believe that because alcohol and tobacco are legal for adults, these substances are not harmful for experimentation by children. Some parents would rather avoid discussing or arguing with their kids about these particular drugs. Others overlook or even encourage drinking at home. Many parents feel it is easier to give clear messages about the dangers of using LSD, cocaine, or heroin than it is to talk about alcohol and tobacco.

If you feel helpless to prevent your child's use of alcohol or tobacco, you are not alone. Don't let this feeling stop you from beginning a dialogue. Studies indicate kids are less likely to use drugs, alcohol, and tobacco when they have frequent and open discussions with their parents. Your child deserves a parent who knows the facts, thinks clearly, and decides where to draw the line. The best way for parents to help kids make healthy choices is to give them a message of non-use and to provide ongoing support.

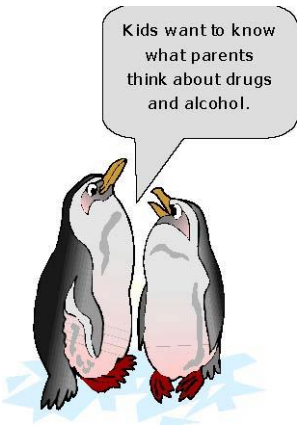
The earlier you start talking about drugs and alcohol and listening to your child, the less likely he/she will be to develop substance abuse problems later. ***However, it is never too late to begin the discussion.***

THE PARENT AWARENESS TEST

(adapted from Patty Jane Pelton, Youth Minister, St. Francis Xavier, Wilmette)

Take this test. Then have your child take it. Do your answers match? Do any surprise you?

1. Who is your child's best friend? What are the names of his/her parents?
2. Organize your thoughts on drugs, sex, rap and rave music. Ask your teen what he/she thinks you know. Tell him/her and give him/her reasons for your opinions. Listen to his/her responses on the same topics.
3. What does your teen want to be when he/she grows up?
4. When was the last time your teen was excited about something? What was it?
5. When was the last time he/she was disappointed? Why?
6. What is your student's favorite music group?
7. What was the last movie your student saw?
8. Who is your teen's hero?



HOSTING A PARTY . . .

- ,Plan parties in advance with your teen. Allow only invited guests. You may wish to have their names and phone numbers available in case of problems. Determine in advance how party crashers will be handled. Open-house parties are difficult to control.

- ,The teen and parent who are hosting the party should agree on ground rules.

- Set an ending time for the party so teens can be home by reasonable curfew times.

- By agreeing that whoever leaves may not return, you will be discouraging party goers from leaving, drinking/using drugs elsewhere, then returning to your home.

- Notify parents of any teen who arrives at the party under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Ensure the teen's safe transportation home. Never let anyone drive under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

- Despite careful precautions, if things get out of hand, do not hesitate to call parents or the police. Keep in mind that if you furnish alcohol or other drugs to minors, you may be brought to court on criminal charges and/or be required to pay monetary damages in a civil lawsuit. Parents must be at home during a party. They must be available, visible, and aware of activities.

Don't be pressured into staying out of sight.

"PRIVACY" DEBATE

If you suspect your child is using drugs, tobacco, or alcohol, would you inspect his/her room, car, e-mail, or possessions? This decision makes many parents squeamish. The "right to privacy" is highly valued in our society, and many parents believe that the concept directly applies to their child's life and possessions. In addition, parents may want to avoid facing an angry child who strongly believes his/her "right to privacy" has been violated. Authorities tell us that there is no such law which protects child's privacy rights, especially if illegal substances might be involved. But the law is not the only issue; the issue is also about trust. Once parents search a child's room or possessions, will the trust be gone? Will the child ever understand that the parent was acting in the child's best interests? Substance abuse experts assure us that trust can return and grow, and this can be a step toward a healthy relationship. Each family must decide how to deal with the issue of weighing the value of personal privacy against your right to know and your responsibility to keep your child safe.

WHEN TEENS GO OUT . . .

- Call the parent in charge of the party; verify the occasion, location, duration, adult supervision, and policy of drug/alcohol use. Some parents do supply alcohol and other drugs! If the activity seems inappropriate, express your concerns to your teen and discuss alternate activities.

- Set a curfew and emphasize that you expect to be called if there is a delay or any change in plans. Set a good example by letting your teen know where you will be.

- Encourage your teen to leave any un-chaperoned party. If trouble arises, they are "guilty by association." If there are drugs or alcohol present, your teen may be subject to arrest.

- Be aware of your teen's transportation. Discuss the importance of never riding with anyone who has used any alcohol or other drugs. Let your teen know that you or a designated responsible person will come when called. Be sure he/she knows where and how to reach you, regardless of time.

- Be awake to greet your teen upon his/her return. Do not be timid about smelling his/her breath. A hug and a kiss accomplish a lot. If you retire early, set your alarm for curfew. That way, you'll know if your teen is late.

- Have emergency funds available in case your teen needs to take a taxi home.

WHEN PARENTS ARE AWAY --THINGS THEY CAN DO . . .

- Lock up the liquor; hide the key.

- Make arrangements with a friend, relative, or neighbor to keep an eye on the house when you are out for the evening.

- Consider a responsible sitter if you are going out of town. An older sibling rarely qualifies, and may be tempted to allow a party, supply liquor, or simply go out himself, leaving the house unattended.

- Don't be blackmailed by "You don't trust me" or "I'm too old for a sitter." Protect your student, your home, and yourself. Use your best judgment on how much responsibility your teen can handle comfortably.

- Tell the parents of your student's friends, as well as your neighbors, when you will be out of town. Give them permission to call the police if they are concerned about teen activities. See that your neighbor can reach you in an emergency.

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"IT'S ONLY . . . A CIGARETTE . . . A BEER . . . A JOINT!"

WHAT CAN YOU SAY?

- *"You're facing some tough choices. Hanging out with friends who smoke or drink makes it harder to say 'no'."* Research shows that if friends or family use cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana, the likelihood increases that a teen or preteen will do the same.

- *"It's illegal for you! Forget it!"* For many families, this is the most valid argument and the easiest to say.

- *"Some of my friends and I tried this stuff when we were younger. Today, we know how easy it is to get hooked and how harmful smoking and drinking can be for you."* These substances are more potent and less pure, and may be contaminated with deadly additives.

- *"Our family has a history of addiction to alcohol (tobacco, tranquilizers, prescription drugs, etc.) and you need to understand you are at higher risk."* Family history is a powerful predictor of substance abuse.

- *"Almost everyone who uses hard drugs started out smoking or drinking. It's too dangerous."* The experimental use of these "gateway drugs" may not predict future substance abuse, but frequently leads to experimentation with harder drugs.

- *"I think abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana is so important that if you do not use these substances, I am willing to give you . . . "* Offer to provide something a child will value highly. Some parents call this bribery; others claim it works for them.

- *"Look at what you would be risking: your health, your driver's license, losing your place on the team (in the play or the honor club), getting sexual diseases, getting pregnant, getting someone pregnant, losing friends, losing respect of others . . . "* It is important for teenagers to understand that the use of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana might cause problems that will change or ruin their lives.

- "Yeah, but they're REALLY harmful for kids. Your bodies do not process this stuff the same way adults do." These facts are supported by numerous studies. **WHAT WILL YOU SAY?**

PARENT POWER

"Parent power is the most important influence on kids," says Joseph Califano with the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse.

The Center reports teenagers are much more likely to be drug-free if their parents are what the study calls "handson:" if they know where their teens are after school, follow grades, and set curfews.

While the study finds that parental engagement is key, only one in four teens describe their parents as "hands-on." About half say their parents set down only limited rules, and one-fifth described their parents as "hands-off."

When if comes to teen drug use, the most risky parental behavior, the study warns, is doing nothing.

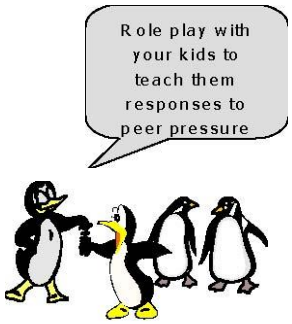
The study also found teens say cigarettes are harder to buy, but marijuana is easier. For the first time, these researchers asked teens about ecstasy, and more than a quarter report knowing a friend or classmate who's used it.

WARNING SIGNS

1. Abrupt change in attendance at school and tardiness to class.
2. Decline in grades.
3. Discipline problems (deviation from student's regular behavior).
4. Change in peer group.
5. Change in physical appearance (wearing sunglasses, long sleeves, dirty clothes, unkept hair).
6. Angry outbursts (overreaction to small annoyances).
7. Over protection of personal possessions (back packs, coats, purses).
8. Frequent trips to the bathroom.
9. Sleeping in class.
10. Loss of interest in extracurricular activities (sports, drama, choir, other clubs).
11. Peers commenting on the student's behavior.

TOP TEN TIPS FOR PARENTS:

1. Don't abuse drugs and alcohol. Our students need to cope with the issues of drugs and alcohol, and parents are the primary influence. What you do counts and there are no secrets.
2. Create opportunities for reward and support for your students. Reward them with your time, not money.
3. Closeness keeps students clean. Share some of your problems with them. It will make it easier for them to share their problems with you.
4. Relate to other parents. Students feel a rush of support when parents relate to other parents.
5. Relate to your student's friends. Bring them into your home; the biggest indicator of whether adolescents will drink is their group of friends.



6. Have a close relationship with your spouse. Don't be afraid of the argument; be afraid of the silence.
7. Do altruistic (selfless; generous) things. Getting "out of yourself" gives you the identity to stay sober. You are the role model for your students.
8. Don't control, contribute. Give your students positive alternatives for having a good time without alcohol or drugs.
9. Do things together. But not all the time.
10. Don't deny your students could be using drugs or alcohol. If you suspect he/she is a user, get help fast.

Adolescents tend to live up to the standards parents set for them. Some parents assume their child will drink no matter what they say or do and focus their concern on providing a "safe place," such as their home, for their child and his/her friends to drink. Experts in the field of substance abuse tell us that this attitude is a sanction to drink. This practice can encourage underage drinking and condone substance abuse in violation of the law.

SETTING THE LIMITS: AN EXERCISE IN COURAGE

Making decisions about your child attending parties in certain homes may be a complicated process. Deciding if he/she can attend a hotel party or a rave might be even more difficult. Make sure you are comfortable with the supervision provided and that your child is capable of handling problems as they arise. If you feel uncomfortable, play it safe and say "no." This may not be a popular choice. It takes a lot of strength, especially when other families are not making the same decisions and are letting their children go, perhaps not realizing the risks involved.

You may be worried about the impact on your relationship with your child if you say "no" too often. Perhaps you are concerned about your child's popularity if he/she is not allowed to participate in friends' activities. The issue here is your child's safety and well-being. Your child may argue and be angry now but may surprise you later with a "thank you" for taking a stand.

Recognize that no matter how hard you try to assess the situation and your child's capabilities, you might make a mistake. You may give your child permission to go to a party only to learn later that drugs and alcohol were involved. Don't worry that you've made a bad decision. Think of what you've learned and how that will help you in your next decision.

REMEMBER, YOUR CHILD'S SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT.

COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER PARENTS . . .

The best offense in the battle against drug and alcohol use is the same one that your kids use against you: OTHER PARENTS! Most parents have heard the whining refrain, "All the other kids' parents let them...!" This persuasive (and manipulative) phrase may result in making you feel alone in your decision making.

It is never too early or too late to find out what other parents are doing. Parents who network and are involved with their children's activities often find they are more successful in helping their kids stay drug- and alcohol-free. By getting to know other parents (through the parents' association, sports activities, volunteering), you can share mutual concerns and solutions.

If you know of a situation involving teen drug or alcohol use, you must take action! Don't join a "conspiracy of silence." Decide upon an option you can live with, such as informing the other parents personally, contacting the school's counselor or an administrator, or writing an anonymous letter. If someone gives you information or gossip about your child, listen! It takes a brave parent to call another with bad news. It then becomes your job to verify the report. The source of this information should be kept confidential.

DRIVING CONTRACT

I, _____, on this day, do agree to the stipulations stated below rendering me the privilege of driving my parents' cars. If, at any time, I violate the said agreement, the driving privilege will be forfeited to the extent and degree of violation.

1. Should I get a traffic violation ticket, I agree to pay for the ticket as well as the difference in the insurance premium for as long as the premium is in effect.
2. I agree to pay for damages that I incur not covered by insurance.
3. At no time will I drink alcoholic beverages or use other drugs and drive at the same time, nor will there be any liquor or beer in the car at any time.
4. I will never transport more passengers than there are seat belts and will not drive the car until all passengers have buckled up.

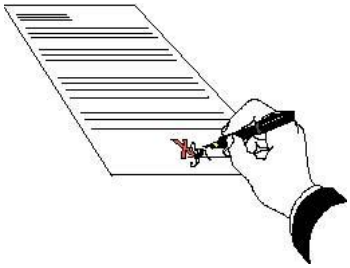
5. I will keep the car that I drive clean, inside and out, and be aware of its needs for gas, oil, etc. I have read the above

agreement and do sign this in accordance with the rules. _____(Child)

_____(Parent/Guardian)

_____(Parent/Guardian)

_____Date



(Source: Ann Landers)