

Keeping Children Safe from Drugs II

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In last week's Crimestoppers article, we drew your attention to some recent trends regarding teens and drug abuse. This week, we hope to give you ways to identify potential drug abuse in teens, as well as offer some tips on how to talk with your teens about drugs.

Because adolescence is often a tumultuous time, even without drugs, signs that your teen may be in trouble are not always easy to spot. Obvious signs you can look for are missing prescription drugs, alcohol, and money or valuable items from your home. Here are a few behavioral signs you can look out for:

- Carelessness regarding personal appearance
- A lack of interest in hobbies and activities your teen used to enjoy
- A change in your teen's group of friends, especially if your teen seems not to want you to meet them
- A drastic change in your teen's eating and/or sleeping habits
- Frequent requests for money, especially if your teen seems hesitant to tell you how he or she spends the money
- Frequent uses of eyedrops

One of the best things you as a parent can do to prevent your teen from abusing drugs is to talk with them. Here are some tips for communicating with your teen from the drug free organization, Freedom from Chemical Dependency.

- Learn to listen. Try not to use every conversation with your teen as an opportunity to lecture them. Instead, try to let them know that you understand what they are thinking and how they are feeling.
- Be ready to talk when they want to talk. Even if you've had a long day and your child wants to talk at 11 p.m., stop what you are doing and make them the sole object of your attention.
- Make the most of teachable moments. If you are watching television or listening to the radio with your child and a situation comes up that involves taking risks, talk to your child about this. Listen to your child to find out their thoughts and then remind them of your family's expectations concerning these behaviors.
- If your child asks you if you have ever tried drugs, according to the FCD, most experts agree that honesty works best. You risk losing credibility with your kids by lying to them. You might say:

“When I was a kid, I took drugs because some of my friends did. I thought I needed to in order to fit in. We didn't know as much as we do now about all the bad things that can happen when you smoke marijuana or use other drugs. If I'd known then about the consequences, I never would have tried drugs, and I'll do everything I can to help you keep away from them.”

“Everybody makes mistakes. When I used drugs, I made a big one. I’m telling you about this, even though it’s embarrassing, because I love you and I want to save you from making the same unhealthy decision I made when I was your age.”

The FCD also recommends being pro-active with your child. Set rules and consequences, communicate these clearly to your teen, and stick with them.

You can find further resources at www.fcd.org/content/resources/parents.asp