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GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CHILDREN CAN HELP PREVENT ALCOHOL & DRUG USE



The best way to keep children away from cigarettes, alcohol, and other dangerous drugs isn't to order them around like a drill sergeant, but to help them feel as comfortable talking to their parents about subjects like sex as talking about baseball or ballet.

In a two-year study of more than 2,000 fifth and seventh graders, researchers discovered a "very strong" link between positive parent/child relationships and low alcohol and drug use by adolescents.

Role of Parenting – Although it has been a long-held belief that peer pressure induces children to start smoking and drinking, it is apparently not as important as an adolescent's relationship with his or her parents, says Dr. Deborah Cohen, who reported her findings in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Dr. Cohen, who is a researcher at Louisiana State University, found that children whose parents "spent more time with them and communicated with them more frequently" had lower rates of experimenting with alcohol and tobacco.

"What's more," says Dr. Cohen, "children whose parents listen to them with empathy are less likely to exhibit disruptive behavior or choose friends who might be considered bad influences." Dr. Cohen offered the following suggestions for parents to develop strong, loving mutually respectful relationships with their children, and thereby help prevent alcohol or drug experimentation:

- Do give children chores, but not as punishment. Chores as punishment are detrimental to a good relationship.
- Don't try to screen your children's friends. Instead of trying to get them to stop associating with certain other children, foster your relationship instead. Your children will be more likely to trust you, and less likely to choose friends who might pressure them into risky behaviors.
- Do try to keep an open mind. You can't force your children to like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, but you can discuss what you like about your favorite bands. Likewise, you may not like the music that your children embrace, but making blanket criticism of their likes and interests can result in mistrust. Instead, encourage your children to tell you what they like about various music, film, and video personalities.
- Do express your expectations simply and clearly. Rules, if stated and explained clearly, can serve as the foundation to a good relationship. Remember that you don't have to let your children attend unsupervised parties; but it helps to explain your reasoning. Children often can appreciate that their parents don't want bad things to happen to them.

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Dr. Timothy Rivinus agrees that a good parent-child relationship is the key to preventing high-risk behaviors by your child. He offers the following additional suggestions:

- Set the family standards on drug and alcohol use early. Tell your children what the rules are, clearly and firmly.
- Familiarize yourself with signs and symptoms of high-risk behaviors. Be a good role model.
- Establish consequences for violating family rules. When you make a rule, explain the reasoning behind it, and make the consequences for breaking the rule clear in advance. Impose the consequences without exception every time a child breaks a rule. Examples of effective punishments include: the loss of privileges, such as driving the car, or spending unsupervised time with friends.
- Set aside time every day to talk to your children about what is happening in their lives, how they feel, and about what they think. Let them talk; you don't have to have the answers.

Listen carefully, and summarize what they've said to show that you've heard them. When appropriate, offer your own personal experiences.

- Respect your children's experiences and feelings.
- Help your children to establish personal goals. Take time to define goals – academic, athletic, social, personal. Goals should be achievable, and should be both the short-term (next month) and long-term (in the next year or two).
- Be sure to celebrate, without insisting on, success. Teach your children how to accept and learn from their inevitable failures, and handle success gracefully.
- Take time to get to know the parents of your children's friends. They can enrich your life, help you understand your children's age group and social concerns, and help you to be a better parent.

Source: [The Addiction Letter](#), 1995, Manisses Communications Group, Inc. P.O. Box 9758 Providence RI 02940-9758 (401) 831-6020.

Part of this handout was adapted with permission from articles by Bill Hendrick appearing in *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution*.

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