



Learn to Raise Drug Free Teens

Many adults accept the general notion that alcoholism is a disease associated with middle-aged folk; however, a federal study released in September 2006 concluded that alcoholism often begins in the teenage years. This survey funded by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism found that of the 44,000 alcoholics surveyed, 47 percent developed their addiction before age 21, and 15 percent before age 18.



The same study also found that the odds of seeking recovery for alcoholism were "lower among those first dependent at age 18, 20, and 25" than those first dependent at age 30 and above. This fact highlights the need for prevention efforts during the teenage years, or earlier. To be a prime factor in preventing alcoholism in your teen's life, there are some guidelines to follow.

Communications is Key

- Avoid bringing up behavioral issues during family activities, make another time to talk.
- Talk to your child or teen about concerning subjects in less than 10 words.

- Ask your child or teen questions, and let him or her do most of the talking.
- Show interest in their daily life; ask about his or her day, what their friends are doing, and how they are coping with tough situations.
- Ask questions that guide teens to the right answers (i.e. Do you have friends you are worried about? What do you think you can do to help?)

Every Action Has a Consequence

Children need to know that there are consequences for their actions. Teens need to know that inappropriate behavior will result in disciplinary action and that parents must set punishments accordingly.

- Explain definitions, terms, and punishments associated with breaking family policies.
- Be specific. Instead of saying "Be responsible," say "If you make a mistake, the responsible thing to do is to call us for help."
- Make enforceable statements, using a structure like: If you don't stop 'x' behavior, I'll do 'y' disciplinary action.
- Remind children or teens of consequences of their illegal behaviors. Even if your child isn't drinking at a party, he could still be arrested and charged for being at an underage party.
- Don't Be Afraid to Set Limits and Punishments

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Too many parents engage in “guilty parenting.” These are individuals who feel like bad parents because they work too much, are divorced, or didn’t give their child everything they needed while growing up. To compensate, they give in to every demand, ignore problem behaviors, and are afraid to say no.



Parents are rarely aware of the good things their child is doing because they are often focused on identifying and punishing the bad. Parents may want to create a privilege system in which teens earn rewards for good behavior and lose privileges for negative

behavior. For example, parents may allow their child to go to a party on Friday night if she does all of her chores throughout the week.

Understand Their Motivation

Teens, like adults, seek validation. Acknowledging and validating the reasons behind teen behaviors is not the same as agreeing with their choices. Therefore, avoid making personal judgments.

- Open up a calm, understanding conversation. This creates an avenue to learn why your teen engages in certain behaviors. A conversation will help redirect behaviors towards more constructive alternatives.
- Avoid reacting to present behavior if your child comes home drunk or high; try to find out the underlying reasons for this behavior.

Teens use drugs because they get some sort of pay-off, whether getting high helps them fit in, gives them confidence to approach the opposite sex, or helps them escape their problems. When they feel judged by their family and more accepted by their peer group, the peer group has greater influence. The

more informed you are as a parent, the more your teen will respect and listen to you.

Harm Reduction

Parents understandably want their children to be perfect, to avoid all potential pitfalls, and to live happy, well-adjusted lives.

But sometimes, it’s better for your child to be safe rather than perfect. In situations when a child is using drugs or alcohol despite a parent’s best attempts at raising a drug-free teen, parents may need to switch from drug-prevention mode to harm-reduction mode.

For example, it may not be ideal that your child is drinking or smoking marijuana, but did he call for a ride home? Was she wise enough and secure enough in her relationship with you, her parent, to call for a ride rather than drink and drive? A wise parent will congratulate their child for knowing how to be safe and responsible, followed the next day when everyone is rested, sober, and clear-headed by a discussion of enforceable consequences.

Teens almost inevitably act out and make some mistakes. The most important thing parents can do is create an ongoing dialogue so their child feels comfortable presenting issues or questions to them at any time. If the situation becomes unmanageable, know when to turn to professionals for help.

If you think your teen needs help, call NCADD’s confidential help line at 732-254-3344. If you wish to read informational pamphlets or view videos that cover various addiction topics, call us today.

References

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Is Your Child A Phone Junkie?

Does your teen panic if she realizes she forgot her cell phone at home? Is she moody and frustrated if she can't check her messages during dinner or a family outing? She may have a cell phone addiction.

Recently, CTIA – The Wireless Association, projected that 270.3 million Americans carried cell phones. In a national survey conducted by CTIA and Harris Interactive, it was reported 79 percent of American teens or 17 million teens have a mobile device, which is an increase of 36 percent from 2005.

With increasing cell phone usage every year, many parents have noticed obsessive behaviors in their teens.

Most teens spend an average of one hour a day on their cell phones. Add in the extra time they spend e-mailing, text messaging, communicating through MySpace, Facebook and most recently Twitter, it's not surprising that many children are getting hooked on their high-tech gadgets.

Know the Warning Signs

Although some argue that cell phone use has not reached addiction status,

parents and guardians should still keep a watchful eye. The symptoms of cell phone addiction are similar to the symptoms of drug or alcohol compulsive use. They may include:

- Feeling restless or uncomfortable when not using a cell phone;
- Having irrational reactions to being without a phone if it is lost or forgotten;
- Substantial increases in the amount of time spent talking on a cell phone;
- Mounting cell phone bills that cause financial distress;
- Problems at school and work from constant cell phone use;
- Taking unnecessary risks such as using a cell phone during inappropriate times (driving, etc.).



How to Prevent Addictive Cell Phone Habits

Most people can enjoy the ever-improving technology and convenience of cell phones without any problems, however, some are unable to function without their mobile device and may be at risk for addiction. Here are some steps to help set boundaries around cell phone use and prevent harmful behavior for both you and your children:

- Set specific times during the day when you and your children can use cell phones, track how many minutes/hours a day are dedicated to cell phone use.
- Make time for mobile-independent activities, such as sports, watching a movie in a theater, or spending time with friends and family.
- Focus on living in the moment and spend less time multi-tasking. Practice active listening and be respectful of other people's time.
- Foster healthy relationships that are strong enough to last a few hours or days without constant contact.
- Turn cell phones off at a certain time each evening so you can unwind without distractions.

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Cell Phones are Helpful, Just Be Careful

Cell phones serve many useful purposes, such as safety and keeping teens in touch with their parents, so going without a cell phone may not be necessary.

While some experts recommend waiting to buy children cell phones until 16 years of age, others advise parents to simply stay alert to teens using cell phones to avoid personal issues, schoolwork, or spending time with the family. If cell phones are having a negative impact on any area of a child's life, it's up to parents to set and enforce limits and seek help when necessary.

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The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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