

How To Be the Parent Drug Dealers Hate

By Amy Grant

With a few questions, parents can be, as the TV ads say, "the Anti-Drug." Asking your child where they are going and who they are going to be with and then spot checking to verify that they are where they say they are and are with who they say they are going to be with is very effective in stopping drug use.

One of the most effective deterrent to drugs is a well-informed parent. While many parents fear that discussing drugs with their children may lead to experimentation, the truth is communication and knowledge could save your child's life. The more your children know about the legal, medical and social effects of using drugs, the better prepared they will be to resist peer pressure and the come-ons of drug dealers.

Drug prevention programs at school, church and community centers often use lectures and scare tactics to warn teens of the dangers of drugs, but concerned and involved parents are the drug dealer's worst enemy.

Foster a close and communicative relationship with your children. Teens who respect their parents and want to please them are far less likely to get involved with drugs. Pay attention to who your children are spending time with and make them accountable for their whereabouts. Allow your children to invite friends into your home frequently so you can get to know them and learn more about their parents.

If you suspect a child is lying, confront him and seek the truth no matter how painful it may be. Establish trust with your children but let them know you may check up on them from time to time. For example if your daughter is spending the night at a friend's house, inform her you will be calling during the evening to make sure she feels comfortable and has everything she needs. When a child knows you may check his or her whereabouts, he is less likely to fabricate a lie in an attempt to sneak off to a forbidden destination.

Talk to your children frankly about the physical, mental and legal complications drugs can cause. Give them booklets, articles from magazines, and help them learn how to resist peer pressure. Children often cave in to peer pressure because no one has taught them how to resist it effectively. Practice role playing with them in different situations and give your kids an arsenal of reasons for saying "No." Let them know if verbal responses aren't working, the best defense is sometimes just to walk away.

Don't make the mistake of thinking drug experimentation is a rite of passage that all kids go through. The drugs that are on the street today are 10 times stronger than anything baby boomers used in the 70s. Talk to your teens about the dangers of club drugs and what can happen at rave parties. Club drugs like Ecstasy, GHB, Meth and LSD can cause serious health problems and even death. Your teen needs to know that experimenting even once could have serious consequences.

Set limits for your children and enforce curfews. Allow some flexibility for special events but ask your kids to check in with you regularly. Take the extra time to call the parents at a home where a party will be held and make sure you feel comfortable with the level of supervision.

Let your children know you are their safety net. If they get into a situation where they feel uncomfortable at a party or after school, they should know they can call you or another trusted adult to come get them. Warn them of the dangers of talking to strangers, and go over safety precautions they can take to protect themselves if they feel they are being followed or harassed.

Question sudden changes in behavior and appearance. Personality changes such as forgetfulness, irritability, and isolation from friends and activities are important warning signs. Pay close attention if your child begins to feign illness in order to skip school or tries to find excuses for avoiding homework. The behavior change may have nothing to do with drugs but it's important to confront the problem whatever the cause.

Try to make your home a safe, warm, and positive environment. When your children feel happy at home they will be less likely to rebel and seek escape in forbidden places.

Provide your children with positive alternatives to drugs. Allow them to do things in their free time that make them feel good such as participating in sports, attending movies, pursuing hobbies, doing volunteer work, and learning new skills such as playing the piano or guitar. Reward them for positive accomplishments such as good grades, winning a role in the school play, etc.

Home environments linked with a high risk for drug abuse include situations where the parents are neglectful, abusive, too lenient or too strict, and where the parents or siblings use tobacco, alcohol and drugs. If affection is not expressed, drugs are never discussed, and economic pressures are a constant problem, children are more likely to turn to drugs.