

School is in session or will be soon. Whether your students are attending in-person or online, it is important for parents to stay aware of their activities. According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, on any given school day:

- Over 4,000 teens will use an illicit drug for the first time;
- Almost 3,500 teens will smoke a cigarette for the first time;
- Close to 7,000 teenagers will drink alcohol for the first time; and
- Over 2,000 teens will use their first prescription painkiller without a doctor's prescription.

There are several reasons for drug abuse at the school level: an increased availability of prescription drugs; a rise in stimulant drug use among youth with ADHD; a mistaken notion that prescription medications are safer than street drugs; a desire to express independence; and – most likely – peer pressure. Unfortunately, a teenager's naïve experimentation can quickly develop into regular drug use, and become an addiction long before he or she reaches 18.

What Parents Can Do

Research suggests that one of the most important factors in healthy child development is a strong, open relationship with a parent. When parents provide their kids with frequent drug-related information before they are exposed to drugs, their kids are less likely to have issues with drugs and alcohol. Parents should keep the following tips in mind:

1. Express disapproval of underage drinking and other drug misuse.

Over 80 percent of young people ages 10–18 say their parents are the leading influence on their decision whether to drink or not. Send a clear and strong message that you disapprove of underage drinking and the use of other drugs.

2. Show you care about your child's health, wellness, and success.

Young people are more likely to listen when they know you're on their side. Reinforce why you don't want your child to drink or use other drugs—because you want them to be happy and safe.

3. Show you're a good source of information about alcohol and other drugs.

Establish yourself as a trustworthy source of information. You want your child to make informed decisions about alcohol and other drugs based upon reliable information about their effects and the dangers involved.

4. Show you're paying attention and discourage risky behaviors.

Show you're aware of what your child is up to, as young people are more likely to drink or use other drugs if they think no one will notice. Do this in a subtle way, without prying.

5. Build your child's skills and strategies for avoiding underage drinking and drug use.

Even if you don't think your child wants to drink or try other drugs, peer pressure can be powerful. Having a plan to avoid alcohol and drug use can help children make better choices. Talk with your child about what they would do if faced with a decision about alcohol and drugs, such as texting a code word to a family member or practicing how they'll say "no thanks."

For more information, please visit our website at www.dugfreeadamscounty.org.