

Back to School

It's back to school time, a time for new classes, and maybe even new schools and new friends. For some families, it can also mean more unsupervised time for kids. Between 3:00-6:00pm is when kids are most likely to make risky decisions, especially with regard to drugs and alcohol. Stress or anxiety about school can increase these possibilities.

So how can we ensure our children are on a path to success?

1. **Family engagement:** Engaged families help guide children, advocate for them, and shape a healthy school environment. Family engagement in schools is linked to better student behavior, higher academic achievement, and enhanced social skills.
2. **Share empowering messages:**
 - **"The sky's the limit."** Too often, we choose to focus more on our limitations than our potential. Modify your thinking, and set an empowering example for your children.
 - **"I believe in you."** Everyone can benefit from hearing this, and there's no better time to start saying it than right now.
 - **"You're not alone."** It is common for teens to feel like no one has ever felt the way they do, so remind them that they are not alone. Reinforce that you are there to help and want them to feel comfortable coming to you and sharing what's on their mind.
3. **Connect and communicate:** Unfortunately, not every parent is on the same page as you regarding underage drinking. That's why it is extremely important to get to know both your children's friends and their parents as well. Also, clearly communicate your stance against underage drinking to your teens, and let consequences be known if rules are broken. If you choose to host a teen party:
 - Be at home and check on them regularly;
 - Refuse to supply alcohol to youth or allow underage drinking in your home or on your property; and
 - Make sure your teen's friends do not bring alcohol into your home; be aware of teens sneaking drinks in bags or purses.

Let your child know that if they ever find themselves at a party or gathering that makes them feel uncomfortable in any way, no matter the situation, they should call or text and you will be there to help them make a quick and quiet exit.

4. **Ensure your children are getting enough sleep:** Insufficient sleep in teens can lead to:
 - Cognitive issues
 - Trouble with memory
 - Diminished focus and attention
 - Difficulty learning
 - Poor judgment and decision making
 - Reduced ability to solve problems
 - Behavioral and social issues
 - Greater tendency to engage in smoking, drinking, and drug use
 - Hyperactivity
 - Aggressiveness, more prone to violence
 - Social withdrawal
 - Difficulty getting along with others

Research indicates that the primary reason kids avoid alcohol, tobacco, or drugs is because it would disappoint their parents. Therefore, parents need to develop strong relationships with their children, be a positive influence, and maintain an open dialogue about substance abuse – the earlier, the better.

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

