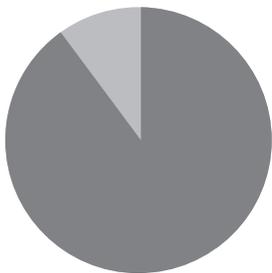


# HOW DO YOU **REALLY** KEEP YOUR KIDS SAFE FROM ADDICTION?

## 10 THINGS PARENTS CAN DO

**F**rom the moment our children are born, keeping them safe is second nature: we hold them close as they get their first shots, teach them to look both ways before crossing the street, and help them develop healthy habits that will nurture them throughout their lives.

We hear very little, though, during the critical early years about how to protect our kids from the disease of addiction. When we hear the word “addiction” we tend to think of our adult friends, relatives, or neighbors who are struggling with substance use, but the reality is that addiction is a disease that begins in childhood.



**90% of Americans with a substance use disorder began using substances before the age of 18.<sup>1</sup>**

Just as we build protection against other medical conditions well before the symptoms are likely to appear, it is essential that we begin strengthening our kids’ protective factors against the disease of addiction prior to the teen years, and well in advance of their ever being in a situation where they could be offered that first drink of alcohol or first puff of marijuana.

There are some risk factors for addiction that we cannot change— genetics, for example— but there are other critical ones— like delaying the age of first use and limiting access to substances— that we can impact. This toolkit translates the science of prevention into simple strategies parents and caregivers can incorporate into busy daily lives, to do what we can to protect our kids from developing an addiction later in life.

# 1 TALK EARLY AND OFTEN

The research is clear— talk early and often with your kids about the risks of using alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, prescription medications and other substances. This isn't a one-time chat, but an ongoing dialogue that will change over time. Try to bring it up in casual settings where everyone can talk freely, such as during a meal, on a walk, or while in the car. Talking about teen substance use does not increase usage— in fact, just the opposite.

Talking about addiction can be hard. Take some time to think about your own relationship to substances, and whether your family has a history of addiction. If you have a drink in front of your kids, that's an opportunity to explain the differences between adult and adolescent brains, and why it is so important for them to delay substance use until their brain is fully developed in their twenties.

Children whose parents talk to them about the risks of drugs and alcohol are 50% less likely to use substances.<sup>2</sup>



# 2 SUPPORT HEALTHY ACTIVITIES

Two of the key factors that reduce the risk of kids developing addictions are “healthy attachment” and “prosocial engagement,” which are fancy words for feeling like you belong and are engaged in positive activities. Whether it's sports, church, Future Farmers of America, 4-H, music, drama, volunteering, or surfing, kids do better when they are kept busy and feel part of a healthy community. It turns out those extracurriculars are less about résumé-building and more about building protective factors to keep them safe!



**The adolescent brain doesn't fully develop until age 25, with the female brain maturing a few years earlier than the male brain.<sup>3</sup>**

### 3

## SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS OF NO USE

A key element in preventing the development of a substance use disorder is delaying the age of drug and alcohol use initiation, especially while the adolescent brain is still developing. Remind your kids that you expect them not to use alcohol or drugs, and be clear about these expectations. Don't assume that they know what you are thinking.

More than 80% of kids ages 10-18 say their parents are the biggest influence on their decision to drink or not drink alcohol.<sup>4</sup>



### 4

## ESTABLISH CLEAR CONSEQUENCES

Be clear, consistent, and specific about what the immediate consequences of substance use are in your family. Rather than saying "you'll be grounded" or "you'll be in big trouble," be specific: *If you use alcohol or drugs, then the consequence will be X for Y amount of time.* On the flip side, remember to reward your child for healthy behaviors and positive decision-making.

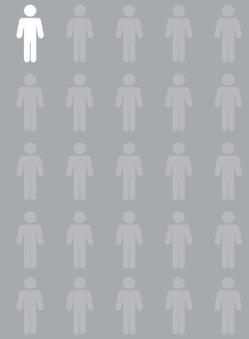
### 5

## IT'S NOT YOUR JOB TO BE COOL

It's tempting to want to be friends with our kids, but what they need most is a parent to guide and support them safely into adulthood by setting clear expectations and holding them accountable. It's important to let kids know that if they find themselves in a risky situation, they should always feel comfortable calling on us to come pick them up.



1 in 4 people who initiate substance use before age 18 develop a substance use disorder, compared to 1 in 25 who delay use until age 21 or older.<sup>1</sup>



## 6

### DO NOT PROVIDE ALCOHOL OR DRUGS TO YOUR TEENS

It's understandable to think that kids would be safer doing something if we are there to monitor them, but this doesn't extend to substance use. Parents condoning or supplying alcohol to their teens— sometimes referred to as “social hosting”— increases adolescent alcohol usage, as well as other unsafe behaviors. Teen drinking is not inevitable. Take steps to limit access to substances, don't partake in social hosting, and remind other parents that adolescent substance use is dangerous no matter where it happens.

## 7

### PAY ATTENTION

It can seem like kids need us less as they grow up, but staying engaged throughout the adolescent years is critically important. Stay involved in your growing kids' lives. Build relationships with other parents in your community and work with them to keep tabs on where teens are gathering and what they are doing. Let other parents know that your kid is not allowed to use substances under any circumstance, and ask about their house rules regarding alcohol and drug use. Be transparent with your kids about having these conversations— it is possible to give them freedom, while also doing your job to keep them safe.

## 8

# MAKE TIME FOR YOUR CHILD

As you nurture your kids' passions outside of the home, remember to also carve out family time. Research shows that spending time with family members and loved ones— bonding over favorite activities or talking about your days— has a long-lasting positive impact and strengthens healthy attachment (even if your teen claims they would rather be doing anything else!). Quality time builds trust and strengthens relationships, which increases the likelihood that if your teen starts to struggle with substance use or another issue, they'll feel more comfortable coming to you for advice and support.



## 9

# PRIORITIZE SLEEP

Getting a good night's sleep is critical for mental and physical health— especially during the adolescent years when brains are undergoing such an important phase of growth and development. Make sleep a priority in your household and find ways to ensure that your child is getting enough rest, such as by implementing lights-out guidelines when appropriate or reducing screen-access before bed. A lack of sleep may not seem like a big deal, but over time it can lead to serious health conditions and make your teen more susceptible to using substances.

Six to twelve-year-olds need 9-12 hours of sleep per night.<sup>5</sup>



## 10

# INTERVENE EARLY

If you think that your kid may be struggling with substance use, don't wait to get help. Science tells us that the earlier a person is treated for a substance use disorder, the better their outcomes, and that treatment works even if a patient isn't feeling "ready."

## REMEMBER...

Parents and caregivers play a crucial role in a child's development. It's important to remember that addiction is a complex disease and there are many factors that contribute to a person's overall level of risk, such as genetics and environmental factors. Implementing evidence-based prevention strategies promotes health in all areas of kids' development, and helps set them on the path of a lifetime of wellbeing.

---

## SOURCES:

1. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. (2011, June). *Adolescent Substance Use: America's #1 Public Health Problem*. Retrieved from <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction-research/reports/adolescent-substance-use-america%E2%80%99s-1-public-health-problem>.
2. National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence, Inc. (2015, July 25). *Talking with Children*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncadd.org/family-friends/there-is-help/talking-with-children>.
3. Sather, R., Shelat, A. (n.d.). *Understanding the Teen Brain*. Retrieved from <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=1&ContentID=3051>.
4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association. (2017, September 20) *Five Conversation Goals*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources/five-conversation-goals>.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018, September 18). *Healthy Schools - Sleep and Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sleep.htm>.

## FURTHER READING:

Addiction Resource Center (ARC)  
[www.addictionresourcecenter.org](http://www.addictionresourcecenter.org)

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)  
[www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)  
[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

*We envision a world where fewer lives are lost and help exists for the millions of people affected by addiction every day.*



[WWW.ADDICTIONPOLICY.ORG](http://WWW.ADDICTIONPOLICY.ORG)

**NEED HELP? WORRIED ABOUT A LOVED ONE?  
REACH OUT.  
1-833-301-HELP(4357)**