

### Parent's Do and Don't List When Children Use Alcohol/Drugs

*When parents are confronted with children who use alcohol/drugs, many feelings come rushing forward all at once – fear, anger, confusion, sadness, regret, hurt, uncertainty, and others. All of these feelings make it difficult to respond to children in the most beneficial manner for both the child and parent. The following lists are guidelines to assist parents when searching for what to do or not do.*

- DO wait to confront your child about his or her drinking/drug abuse until he or she is not under the influence. Offer protection for the child and those around him or her.
  - DO keep in mind that you are not responsible for your child's behavior.
  - DO allow your child to take responsibility for his or her drinking or drug using behaviors.
  - DO provide consequences for alcoholic or drug-induced behavior that causes havoc in family life or destroys the home. Also require restitution for any loss or destruction.
  - DO talk to your child about his or her drinking or drug use when he/she is sober. Keep communication lines open. Use "I" messages.
  - DO ensure that your behavior remains of your own choosing and is not a result of being brought down by your child's drinking or drug use.
  - DO view your child as being out of control rather than lacking in backbone or willpower. The addiction process is an illness.
  - DO allow your child to be responsible for his or her own messes and predicaments.
  - DO remember that the way your child acts when drinking or using drugs isn't an indication of their love for you. Chemicals cause drastic changes in personality.
  - DO be patient with your child. Always let him or her save face with alternatives. You are responsible for setting the alternatives.
  - DO maintain consistent consequences for drinking and drug usage.
  - DO respect the privacy of your child. Monitor conduct, but avoid snooping. Base judgments on facts. Be prepared to intervene if behavior becomes self-destructive.
  - DO present consequences you are willing and able to back up. Keep them logical and natural. Involve your child in establishing the rules for your home.
  - DO attempt to communicate with your child. Encouragement is important at all ages. Kids are people, not "monsters" or "bums".
  - DO seek information and support. You are not alone, but part of a network.
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- DON'T confront your child about drinking or drug use while he or she is under the influence.
  - DON'T make excuses to your spouse, family, friends or school authorities for your child's drinking or drug use.
  - DON'T take responsibility for your child's drinking or drug problem.
  - DON'T allow a child under the influence of drugs or alcohol to cause havoc within the family or destroy the home.
  - DON'T nag or scream at an adolescent about their alcohol/drug problem.
  - DON'T clean up your substance-abusing child's messes and predicaments.
  - DON'T let yourself be so ruled by your child's addictive behavior that you let it pull down your own behavior.
  - DON'T view your child as lacking backbone or willpower.
  - DON'T assume your child doesn't love you because of the way he/she acts while under the influence.
  - DON'T be patronizing or indulgent.
  - DON'T play amateur detective – following your child around to spy on them is a waste of time and energy.
  - DON'T give a substance-abusing child any money, except for a minimal allowance.
  - DON'T make threats you are not prepared to back up.

# What Parents Can Do to Prevent Chemical Abuse in the Family

**LEARN:** Become knowledgeable about the most common drugs and alcohol abused in your area. Be aware of which drugs or alcohol your children could possibly abuse in your home.

**TALK:** Discuss drugs and alcohol with your spouse/partner and children. You may want to practice before talking with your child. Tell your child you want to help him/her make good decisions and that they can talk to you about anything at any time.

**TEACH:** Teach your child that the stress of daily life can be handled without abusing drugs/alcohol.

**SET THE EXAMPLE:** Show your children how to live without abusing alcohol and drugs in your own life. Your child cannot be expected to listen to drug warnings if cocktails, cigarettes, and unwarranted medications are a part of your daily routine.

**CONTROL:** Keep track of medicinal drugs and alcohol in your home. Take medications as directed and destroy leftovers. Always supervise your child's use of medication. Don't give medicine prescribed for one family member to another.

**KNOW:** Know the facts about drugs and alcohol. Your child may already know a great deal about them. Thus, scare tactics based on half-truths are usually not effective.

**HELP:** Your child may be going through a difficult time weighing the consequences of drugs and/or

alcohol. Your help could make the difference.

Being open and available to your child if they get into a decision-making situation provides them with a safe alternative.

**ACTIVITIES:** Plan family activities. Don't give your child money and drop him/her off at the movies. Go with them. Enjoy the company of your children and let them enjoy your company.

**LISTEN:** This is a time of decision and indecision for your child. Be sure that you listen to your child. This may not be a time to comment or give suggestions.

**LOVE:** One of the toughest jobs for a parent is to do what is best for the child. This may include letting a child suffer the consequences of his or her actions. You have established rules for your home and children should observe these rules, even if they anger him/her at the time. They will thank you for it later.

**DO NOT PANIC:** If you find out your child is abusing drugs or alcohol, don't panic. Talk it out with your child and seek professional assistance. It is not the end of the world. There are many substance-abuse therapists and programs available throughout the state. Your school counselor can direct you to the appropriate professionals.

MCGCP Personal/Social Development - Reviewed 9/11

*Parent's Do and Don't List When Children Use Alcohol/Drugs was adapted with permission from a Mediplex Group brochure. For information, contact Mediplex Regional Office at 913-373-4280.*

*What Parents Can Do to Prevent Chemical Abuse in the Family was adapted with permission from a Missouri Institute for Prevention Services Southeast leaflet. For information, contact MIPS Southeast at 573-756-8679.*

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