

Chapter 1

Just the Facts, Ma'am



*The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking
new landscapes but in having new eyes.*

-Marcel Proust

Did you know that:

- A child who reaches age 21 without smoking, abusing alcohol, or using drugs is virtually certain never to do so.
- A child who begins drinking before age 15 is four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21.
- More than 40 percent of children who begin drinking before age 13 will develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some time in their lives.
- Alcohol is a contributing factor in the top three causes of death among teens: 1) accidents, 2) homicide, and 3) suicide.
- The likelihood that your child will try drugs dramatically increases during the year that he/she transitions from elementary school to middle school or junior high.
- The average age at which teens start using tobacco is 12.
- The average age at which teens start drinking is almost 13.
- The average age at which teens start smoking pot is 14.
- By the 8th grade, 52 percent of teens have consumed alcohol, 41 percent have smoked cigarettes, and 20 percent have used marijuana.

Think for a minute. Ask yourself, “Why is it that out of all of the facts that I could have shared with you, I chose the above?” What relevance do they have to your child’s emotional and physical well-being? How might these facts reflect your concerns about your child?

Here’s what the research tells us. Teens who smoke cigarettes are more likely to drink alcohol. Teens who smoke and drink are more likely to use marijuana. And those who use all three are more likely to use other illicit drugs. Use of illicit drugs such as underage drinking, marijuana, and inhalants can result in social consequences (e. g., failing in school) and physical consequences such as reduced stamina and fitness or damage to the lungs and brain.

Yet, if you’re like most parents, it’s likely that you can’t imagine your child downing a six-pack, lighting up a joint, smoking crack, snorting heroin, or taking a hit of ecstasy. But research tells us that whereas only 20 percent of parents think their kids may have been offered illicit drugs, 53 percent of teens report having been offered an illicit substance.

Think about that! How do you explain the disconnect between parents’ perceptions of what their children are exposed to and their children’s reality? Could it be that some parents:

- Minimize the likelihood of their child being exposed to alcohol and other drugs?
- Rationalize the likelihood of their children being exposed to drugs and alcohol by saying that, “it can never happen to us?”
- Bury their head in the sand about the likelihood that their child may consume alcohol and other drugs?

- Blindly hope for the best?
- Feel overwhelmed about how to help their teen navigate the dangerous waters of adolescence?
- Abdicate responsibility for their children's emotional well-being to schools and other community resources?
- Feel discouraged and defeated and so have given up?

The facts are the facts, and they beg to be paid attention to. The *Monitoring the Future Study*, an ongoing national study of the behaviors, attitudes, and values of teens and young adults in America reports trends in substance use and abuse. Some highlights of the latest data from that study follow.

Alcohol

- 21.5 percent of 8th grade students report current alcohol use, this percentage increases to 39 percent of 10th grade students and nearly 50 percent of 12th grade students.
- Among 12th grade students, 30 percent report consuming five or more drinks in a row in the two weeks prior to the survey.
- 3 million children ages 14 through 17 are regular drinkers who already have a confirmed alcohol problem.
- 40 percent of children who begin drinking before the age of 15 will become alcoholics at some point in their lives.

Tobacco

- Over one-fifth of 12th grade students report smoking tobacco cigarettes daily.

Illicit Substances

- 54 percent of adolescents tried an illicit substance by the time they finished high school.
- 29 percent of 12th grade students tried an illicit substance other than marijuana.
- Ecstasy (MDMA) was the primary drug showing an increase in use among students in all grade levels.

So what can you do to insure that your child doesn't become *just another statistic*? Believe you me, there's plenty that you can do! You can play a decisive role in helping your children avoid consuming alcohol and other drugs.

You don't believe me? Well according to the parents, The Anti-Drug pamphlet—*Keeping Your Kids Drug-Free*, those children who've learned about the risks of alcohol and other drugs from their parents are:

- 36 percent less likely to smoke marijuana
- 50 percent less likely to use inhalants
- 56 percent less likely to use cocaine
- 65 percent less likely to use LSD

What can you do to reduce the possibility that your child will ever try alcohol and other drugs? Here are a few specific parenting practices confirmed by research to effectively help to ensure that children develop skills, interests, and activities that ultimately keep them from getting involved with alcohol and other drugs.

Bridge Builder's Checklist

Parenting practices to help prevent your child from consuming alcohol and other drugs.

- 1) **Talk to your child about alcohol and other drugs.** Make sure he understands the dangers and problems of alcohol and other drugs consumption.
- 2) **Learn to listen to your child.** Talking to your child is only half the job. Help keep open the lines of communication by knowing how to listen, and by knowing when to stop talking and listen.
- 3) **Help your child feel good about herself.** Your child is often unsure of herself. Knowing that you have confidence in her and believe in her self-worth means a lot. You can communicate this faith in her by giving lots of specific and believable praise and encouragement to your child at appropriate times.
- 4) **Help your child develop strong values.** A strong value system anchored in a clear sense of right and wrong can give your child the courage to make decisions based on facts and sound values rather than on peer pressure.
- 5) **Be a good role model.** Your child is very aware of your habits and spoken and unspoken attitudes concerning alcohol and other drugs. He will tend to follow your example.
- 6) **Help your child deal with peer pressure.** Children who are taught to be gentle and agreeable also may need skills to resist peer pressure. Help her practice ways she can say no and feel confident about herself and her decisions.
- 7) **Set firm rules against alcohol and other drugs consumption.** Have clear family rules. Tell your

child that he is not allowed to drink, smoke, use other drugs, or engage in activities to which you object. Be sure that he thoroughly understands the consequences of breaking these rules. Enforce the rules consistently.

- 8) **Encourage healthy, creative activities.** Make sure your child has enough structure in her daily life. Create activities for her or encourage her to take part in sports, school programs, or hobbies she might enjoy. Join your child in having fun.
- 9) **Talk with other parents.** They're going through the same things you are. Networking with neighborhood parents and community groups can help. If your child is going to a party or getting together with friends, make sure there is a chaperone and that there will be no alcohol and other drugs.
- 10) **Know what to do if you suspect a problem.** Learn to recognize the telltale signs of alcohol and other drugs consumption and get appropriate help quickly from a doctor or other professional.

To learn about more specific practices to follow in order to raise your child not to use alcohol and other drugs, please read on.