

Chapter 4

Monitoring Your Child



*Kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents
are four times more likely to use drugs.*

-Partnership for A Drug-Free America

Monitoring your child is yet another way in which you can influence whether or not your child will consume alcohol and other drugs. Monitoring your child means knowing:

- Where your child is going.
- What your child is doing.
- With whom your child is going.
- With whom your child is spending time.
- Who are all of your child's friends.
- Limiting the time your child spends without adult supervision.

Now it may seem like an overly simplistic suggestion that you monitor your child's comings and goings. Or you may recoil at the suggestion that you *micromanage* your child's life. But listen to the results of a recent survey taken by the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA).

The CASA study consisted of a series of questions designed to determine the extent to which parents actively monitored their child's activities and established expectations for positive behavior. By administering these questions, CASA attempted to measure the presence of three styles of parenting in a household. The three styles of parenting were referred to as 1) *hands-on parenting*, 2) *half-hearted parenting*, and 3) *hands-off parenting*.

The results of the study revealed how parents in the sample group exercised their parental prerogatives. There were twelve

questions administered to measure each respondent's parenting style. A *hands-on parenting* style was present when at least ten of the actions described, in the twelve questions posed in the survey, were performed by parents in the household. *Half-hearted* parenting was present when parents performed six to nine of the 12 asked about actions. *Hands-off parenting* was present when teens said parents performed five or fewer of the asked about actions.

Based on the results of CASA's survey, the following was determined.

- Only about one-quarter of our nation's teens (27 percent) live in households where their parents are hands-on, meaning that they establish rules and expectations of behavior in their households.
- 55 percent of teenagers live in half-hearted households where their parents are less consistent in setting rules and standards of behavior.
- 18 percent live in households with hands-off parents or absentee parents.
- The risk of alcohol and other drugs use for teens living with hands-on parents is half what it is for the average teen.
- The risk of alcohol and other drugs use for teens living in hands-off households is double the average teen.
- The risk of alcohol and other drugs use for teens living in hands-off households risk is four times greater than for teens in hands-on households.
- The risk of alcohol and other drug use for teens living in half-hearted households is twice that of teens in hands-on households.

Clearly, a *hands-on* parenting style is optimal for ensuring that your child does not get involved with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs. So how can you develop a *hands-on* parenting style as measured by the CASA survey? To be considered a *hands-on* parent as measured by the CASA survey, at least 10 of the following 12 must be true.

- Monitor what your child is watching on TV.
- Monitor your child's use of the Internet.
- Put restrictions on CDs your child may buy.
- Know where your child is after school and during weekends.
- Be told the truth about your child's whereabouts.
- Be aware of your child's academic performance.
- Impose a curfew.
- Make it clear that you would be extremely upset if your teen consumed alcohol and other drugs.
- Eat dinner with your child six or seven nights a week.
- Turn the TV off during dinner.
- Assign regular chores for your child.
- Have an adult present when your child comes home from school.

The most vulnerable time of day for your child is from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Your child is at the greatest risk for abusing alcohol and other drugs during these hours. Call your child's school to find out about adult-supervised activities he can take part in during these hours. Encourage him to get involved with youth groups, art, or music programs, organized sports, community service, or academic clubs. Follow up with your child to make sure he is actually going to the program he has chosen.

Although monitoring is an effective protective measure for your child, it isn't always easy. If your child readily talks about what's going on, then monitoring happens naturally during the course of events. If it doesn't, you'll need to make an extra effort to facilitate monitoring your child's day-to-day activities. To that end, read the following tips from the brochure, *Tips For Raising Drug-Free Teens*, developed by MetLife and Partnership for A Drug-Free America.

Know Where Your Teen Is

Less than half of parents of teens report knowing exactly what their child does after school. It's important to know where your teen is and what they're doing. Research has shown that children without adult supervision are at significantly greater risk of truancy from school, stress, receiving poor grades, risk taking behavior, and substance abuse.

Sample questions:

- Where will you be this afternoon?
- Where are you going after practice?

Get Your Teen Involved in After-School Activities

Research has shown monthly use of marijuana was less among youths who participated in team sports compared with those who did not participate. Find out what adult-supervised activities interest your teen and help get them involved.

Sample questions:

- What sport interests you most?
- What after-school activities are offered at your school?

Know Your Teens' Friends

Research from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America

(PDFFA) reports that more than half of teens say they have close friends who get high regularly. Are these the close friends your teen hangs out with? Parents should personally know their teens' friends—and their parents—as an effort to ensure their friends are not introducing their teen to drugs. Your teen might resist giving details, but don't be discouraged.

Sample Questions:

- Who will be at the party?
- Who are you going to the game with?

Know The Dangers of Drugs

To talk credibly and effectively about the dangers of drugs, parents need to learn the effects of drugs that teens may be exposed to. For example, the effects of ecstasy can vary from depression to severe anxiety, or even death. However only 51 percent of parents report knowing the effects of ecstasy. Parents need to be credible when addressing the dangers of drugs—because teens will know when they're being lied to. To learn more about the effects of different drugs, go to [www.drugfreeamerica.org/Drug Resource](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/DrugResource).

Sample Questions:

- Did you know that Ecstasy can cause paranoia and depression?
- Do you know what can happen if you mix drugs?

Talk With Your Teen

Kids who say they learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs. Parents should talk often, listen regularly, and communicate that they do not want their kids using drugs. Remember: Your teens are counting on you to be the grown-up. For tips on what to say, go to chapter 9, *What to Teach Your Child About Alcohol and Other Drugs*.

Recognize Signs Your Teen is Using Drugs

One of the toughest things about drug use for parents is that often they cannot detect that their teen might be using drugs. However, there are some general warning signs you can watch for.

Signs your teen could be using drugs:

- Change in friends
- Change in sleeping pattern
- Declining grades
- Loss of interest in hobbies or favorite activities
- Lack of motivation
- Hostile and uncooperative attitude
- Unexplained disappearance of household money

Be Pro-Active

Drug use is a choice, but it is a choice you can influence. Teens report one of the greatest risks related to smoking pot is upsetting their parents. Parents need to talk *with*—not *at*—teens about the dangers. Monitor your teens' time, friends, and activities—even if you don't think your teen is using drugs.

- Make it very clear that you do not want her to use alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, or other drugs.
- Find out if he really understands the consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.
- Get to know her friends by taking them to and from after-school activities, games, the library, and movies (while being sensitive to her need to feel independent).
- Check in with her friends' parents often to make sure you share the same anti-drug stance.

- Volunteer for activities where you can observe him at school.
- Hold a weekly family meeting to check in with each other and address problems or concerns.
- Get your kids involved with adult-supervised after-school activities.
- Give kids who are unsupervised after school a schedule of activities, limits on their behavior, household chores to accomplish, and a strict phone-in-to-you policy (along with easily accessible snacks).
- Make it easy for your child to leave a situation where alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs are being used.
- Call kids' parents if their home is to be used for a party; get assurance that no alcoholic beverages or illegal substances will be at the party.
- Set curfews and enforce them.
- Encourage open dialogue with your children about their experiences.

Bridger Builder's Checklist

Tips for monitoring your child.

- 1) Monitor your child's time, activities, behaviors, and friendships.
- 2) Know who your child is spending time with.
- 3) Know who your child's friends are.
- 4) Talk to your child on a daily basis so as to remain informed about their daily activities.
- 5) Structure your child's day-to-day activities so as to avoid occurrences when your child may be unsupervised by an adult.
- 6) Prevent your child's access to alcohol and other drugs in your home.

- 7) Ask questions about where your child is going and with whom.
- 8) Check in with the parents of your child's friends.
- 9) Invite the parents of your child's friends to attend meetings on alcohol and other drugs-related problems.
- 10) Create an emotional climate of warmth, acceptance, and understanding that will develop an enduring bond of love and belonging in the family.
- 11) Identify family values and family rules about under-age consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Make them clear to all family members.
- 12) Provide information to your children about the physical, mental, and emotional effects of alcohol and other drugs.
- 13) Explain to your child why drug use does not relieve stress and other negative emotions.
- 14) Assure your child that you love him.
- 15) Be responsive to your child's needs.