

You Can Minimize the Harm

"We've come to the point of saying almost anything to discourage our kids from using drugs."

Learn all you can about drug abuse. Read books, research local addiction services for information and counselling, attend your local meetings of AA and NA, Alanon and Nar-anon. (In Vancouver, contact "Parents Forever.")

- ◆ Provide accurate information for your child. Nothing offends teenagers more quickly than what they see as scare tactics. Don't preach; just try to open a discussion or leave information around the house.
- ◆ Do not judge your child weak, stupid or lacking in will power because she or he is unable to control their drug use. Addiction is a disease and can happen to anyone. It knows no boundaries.
- ◆ Take heart. While it may seem that children take all their cues from their peers, parental values and attitudes win out more often than you think.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to talk to your child's friends. If you avoid and alienate the peer group your son or daughter has chosen, then no matter how much you disapprove, you will also alienate your child.
- ◆ Try to ensure that your child's friends know the many dangers of drug use and can recognize overdose symptoms and act quickly. This is particularly important with younger teenagers and party drugs such as crystal meth, ecstasy, cocaine, prescription drugs and alcohol. Friends are the most likely to be able to keep tabs on unusual behaviour.
- ◆ Talk to the parents of your children's friends.

Using alcohol and other drugs can change people's behaviour dramatically. They are more likely to have unprotected sex, drink and drive, and indulge in antisocial behaviours such as fighting, stealing and acts of daring. Therefore, your words and your own actions will promote responsibility, ideally in these ways:

- ◆ Remind your child of the safe sex rule. The rule about using a condom applies generally, but extra vigilance is required because alcohol and other drugs can interfere with good judgement, causing loss of inhibitions and control.
- ◆ Stress that your child call you at any time of the night to be picked up, or that you will pay for a cab ride home. Give them a phone card so they can make the call.

- ◆ Encourage the designation of a “voice of reason” for their group. This non-using individual can look for signs of drug overdose or a bad reaction and can be responsible for seeking help, should things go wrong.

Preventing fatalities

Make sure that your child and their peer group know:

- ◆ Mixing drugs is extremely dangerous. Drug use along with alcohol is the MOST dangerous.
- ◆ Signs of a bad reaction to drugs or overdose should not be ignored. If somebody passes out or is incoherent (or a sleeping person has laboured or rattling breath, is snoring in an unusual way, or can't be woken up,) it is crucial to call an ambulance - **DIAL 911**.
- ◆ If somebody is unconscious but still breathing, lay them on their side and pull the head back slightly to stretch the neck so their breathing will be unobstructed. If necessary, clear their airway of vomit or mucus by rolling the person on their side. Do not put anything in their mouth.
- ◆ Be ready to give ambulance staff information about what has been taken so that treatment can be administered effectively and immediately.
- ◆ It is better to deal with an unpleasant situation than for someone to suffer brain damage or death.
- ◆ Police need not always be involved.