

Talking and listening is the key to drug-free teens

Talking to your teens about alcohol and drugs is one of the most important things that you can do to prevent substance use issues in your home. It seems so simple, but parents often under-estimate the influence that they have on their teens, especially once they reach high school.

Getting your teen to talk to you may not be an easy task. Many teens feel uneasy when talking to their parents about drug use. This is normal. Don't take it as a sign to back away, they need you. Young people want their parents to stay involved in their lives even though you might be hard-pressed to find a teen to admit to it. If talking about drugs and alcohol seems hard — start small. Talk about their day, their classes, friends, stresses and dreams. Talking about the little things makes talking about big things easier.

You will be one step closer to maintaining a strong relationship with your teen if you can keep the lines of communication open and talk about important issues like drugs and alcohol in a calm and respectful way. Remember, talking is not the same as lecturing. It requires two-way communication. Therefore, listening is just as important. Here are some tips to help you talk to your teen about alcohol and drugs:

• Ask questions that they can't answer "yes" or "no" to — like, what do you think about marijuana? What would you do if you

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were pressured to drink?

• Listen by nodding, try to maintain eye contact, clarify what they have said — "So, you think pot is not such a big deal."

• Don't assume that a teen's experience with drugs and alcohol today is similar to when you were a teen. Find out how times have changed.

• Find a natural time to talk — for example, when watching TV, going for a walk, or in the car. Sometimes, being beside them instead of across from them makes it easier to open up.

• To get a conversation started, use teachable moments — talk

about a newspaper article, music video, TV show.

• Avoid lecturing — they will often tune out.

• Clearly communicate family rules and consequences about the use of alcohol and drugs.

• Try to end the conversation positively — they are more likely to approach you again.

Talking about drugs and alcohol in a way that is respectful, honest and non-judgmental will help you to stay connected to your teen, and help them decide what impact drugs and alcohol will have on their lives. Don't delay — let your teen know you want to talk.

For more information, call the Halton Region Health Department at 905-825-6000, Toll free 1-888-866-4HALTON (1-888-442-5866), TTY 905-827-9833. Visit our Web site at www.region.halton.on.ca/health.

Health Notes is prepared by staff of the Halton Region Health Department.

Q: Why did the chicken cross the road?


A: To live longer.



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