



Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
Clint Eastwood Youth Program



Parents: The “anti-drug”

As a parent, you may fear that you will push away your teens by talking to them about drug use, or that you may start them thinking about drugs or alcohol. But unless your children live in a bubble, your conversations are not likely to be the first they’ve heard about drugs and alcohol. It is imperative that you talk with your teens, that you give clear messages, that you seek help for yourself if you have a problem with drugs or alcohol, and that you take action if you see your child using drugs/alcohol. Parents are called the anti-drug for a reason; you are still the most important person in your child’s life.

Teens need set rules and clear expectations

- Using a “balanced” parenting style — warm and involved, while setting firm limits and demonstrating respect — seems to work best for raising teens who have higher self-esteem and self-reliance, are less likely to engage in risky behavior, do better in school, and report less depression and anxiety.
- Teens who describe a positive relationship with their parents (trust, closeness, mutual respect, good communication) are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.
- Parents who are overly permissive and those unwilling to set limits deprive teens of needed guidance, supervision, and behavior safeguards.
- Lax, inconsistent, or excessively harsh discipline combined with excessive, unrealistic demands puts teens at higher risk for drug use.
- Adolescents who believe their parents would disapprove rather than tolerate or not really disapprove of marijuana use are six times less likely to use.
- Teens are more likely to communicate openly when parents communicate honestly and openly about real issues

Communicating effectively with teens

- Keep your eye on the goal. If you are upset, angry, or afraid, you may focus on being right, punishing, or making the other person “see the light.” If you focus on the goal, you’re more likely to communicate in positive, goal-directed ways.

- Stick with the facts. “The alcohol in the garage is missing” is a fact. “You or one of your friends took some wine from the garage” is most likely a judgment.
- Clearly state your intentions. “I want you to hear my concerns; I’m not about making your life miserable.” “I have heard that several of the friends you want to go to the beach with use drugs/ alcohol and I am concerned about you being in that environment.”
- Monitor your tone of voice and body language, and stay on topic. We all respond to more than the words of what is being said, and teens are especially sensitive to silent messages (looks, folded arms, tone of voice, volume, etc.).
- Set rules and expectations before an event; it is much easier to hold everyone accountable if the rules are clearly stated and understood in advance.
- Talk with your teens, even when nothing is “wrong” or they aren’t asking to do something you have concerns about. It is easier to deal with the tough situations when you have practice with the easy ones.
- After any talk with your teen, evaluate how it went. If you did more than 50 percent to 75 percent of the talking, you need to increase your teen’s participation — try to make him or her more comfortable, be patient waiting for responses, ask more open-ended questions, etc.
- Be clear and realistic when talking about drugs and alcohol. Trying to scare a teen out of using may not work; a concerned reasonable approach is usually best (even if your kids don’t think anything you do is reasonable).

Parental involvement, the key to helping your teens

Parental involvement plays a vital role in keeping adolescents from using drugs and alcohol. Informed parents can help teens cope with the pressures and influences they experience.

Parents are key to recognizing signs of a problem for their children. But myths still persist about alcohol that lead many parents to miss signs of serious trouble. Some parents think drinking is no big deal (“It’s just alcohol” or “At least they’re not doing drugs”). Others may minimize drug use, especially if they grew up during a time of widespread drug experimentation. But today there are “designer” drugs available that did not exist previously, and marijuana potency has increased exponentially in the last 20 years.

Parents need to question beliefs about the harmlessness of drug and alcohol use. Children who begin using drugs/alcohol before the age of 15 are more likely to develop a lifelong dependence. Give your kids a regular dose of the most powerful “anti-drug” available.

This information is brought to you by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula’s Clint Eastwood Youth Program, providing a structured program to treat drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems.

For more information or to schedule a free screening, please call **373-0924** or **800-528-8080**

