

Clinical Corner – Talking to Your Child About Drugs

The best thing about this subject is that you don't have to do it well. You simply have to try. If you try, your kids will get the message. That you care about them. That you understand something about the conflicts they face. That you're there when they need you.

The alternative is to ignore the subject. Which means your kids are going to be listening to others who have strong opinions about the subject. Including those who use drugs. And those who sell them.

Accept Rebellion

At the heart of it, drugs, alcohol, wild hairstyles, trendy clothes, ear-splitting music, outrageous language are different ways of expressing teenage rebellion.

That's not all bad. Part of growing up is to create a separate identity, apart from parents, a process which ultimately leads to feelings of self worth. A step along that path is rebellion of one kind or another which is to say rejecting parental values, and staking out new ones.

You did it. They're doing it. And that's the way it is.

The problem comes when kids choose a path of rebellion that hurts them, destroys their self worth and can ultimately kill them.

That's the reality of drugs.

Don't Get Discouraged

When you talk to your kids about drugs, it may seem as though nothing is getting through.

Don't you believe it.

The very fact you say it gives special weight to whatever you say.

But whether or not your kids let on they've heard you, whether or not they play back your words weeks or months later, keep trying.

Start Anywhere

"Have you heard about any kids using drugs?"

"What kind of drugs?"

"How do you feel about that?"

"Why do you think kids get involved with drugs?"

"How do other kids deal with peer pressure to use drugs? Which approaches make sense to you?"

"Have you talked about any of this in school?"

However you get into the subject it's important to state exactly how strongly you feel about it. Not in threatening tones but in matter-of-fact, unmistakably clear language:

"Drugs are a way of hurting yourself."

"Drugs take all the promise of being young and destroy it."

"I love you too much to see you throw your life down the drain."

Some Do's And Don'ts.

The do's are as simple as speaking from the heart.

The biggest don't is don't do all the talking. If you listen to your kids - really listen and read between the lines - you'll learn a lot about what they think. About drugs. About themselves. About the world. And about you. They'll also feel heard and that, too, is a step along the path towards self esteem.

There are other do's and don'ts: Don't threaten. Don't badger them. Don't put your kid on the spot by asking directly if he or she has ever tried drugs. They'll probably lie, which undermines your whole conversation.

If you suspect your child is on drugs - there are all sorts of symptoms - that's a different matter. Then you've got to confront the subject directly.

In the meantime, just talk to them.

It's okay if you don't know much about drugs.

Your kids do.

But they need to know how you feel about the subject.

And whether you care.

For more information on how to talk with your kids about drugs, ask for a free copy of "Keeping Youth Drug-Free."
Call **1-800-788-2800**.