

DRUG PREVENTION FOR PARENTS

**MENTOR INTERNATIONAL'S SELECTION OF SUBSTANCE
ABUSE PREVENTION RESOURCES FOR PARENTS**

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HOME

SCHOOL

COMMUNITY

Introduction

Mentor is the leading international federation of not-for-profit organisations working around the world to empower young people and prevent drug abuse. We use our position to apply and share our knowledge internationally so that the benefits of effective drug prevention practice become visible worldwide.

This guide intends to offer parents and caregivers easily accessible information about drug prevention in order to help them raise empowered, healthy and drug free children .

Most young people will be exposed to drugs and alcohol before they reach 18 years of age. As a parent and caregiver you have a key role to play in helping empower your child to make healthy life choices and ultimately prevent them from abusing drugs and alcohol.

Evidence suggests that drugs and alcohol can harm children and young people in several ways:

- They contribute to poor judgment and making bad decisions
- They increase the chances of getting into fights, accidents and other dangerous situations
- They damage the growing body and developing brain
- They may lead to addiction during adolescence, although evidence suggests this does not happen at a high rate

Evidence suggests that telling children to “just say no” to drugs and alcohol is simply not effective. There are many things parents can do to help empower children to avoid drug abuse. Even if you do not think your child has experimented with drugs or alcohol, this guide will equip you with valuable information to make you aware of the challenges young people face, and also refer you to additional resources that can support you in dealing with these challenges.

This guide brings together some of the best evidence-based advice and guidance from a range of leading organisations worldwide that work to prevent substance abuse, but it only highlights some examples. You can find plenty more resources on Mentor International’s [Resource Finder](#).

This guide is divided into three sections to provide parents with tips to raise happy and healthy kids in their home, the school and the community:

1) **HOME:** Helping you to teach your children to develop good behaviours and social skills to promote a healthy lifestyle and reduce the likelihood of them abusing substances. Focusing in particular on:

- Building your child’s resilience
- Establishing good communication
- Monitoring your child’s behaviour
- Healthy relationships
- Knowing the facts on alcohol and other drugs

2) Helping you ensure your child is connected to **SCHOOL**

3) Helping you ensure your child is connected to your **COMMUNITY**

Building Resilience

Parents or primary carers have the most influential role over a child's life and development. Ultimately your child will make their own choices about drug and alcohol use; however you can play a key role in supporting them to make good decisions and in keeping them safe.

Building resilience prepares children for difficult situations throughout their lives, being able to confidently cope with everyday situations and face life's challenges. Research has shown that while some people seem to be more resilient naturally, these behaviours can also be learned. Teaching your child to be resilient will empower them to say no to drugs, alcohol and other risky behaviour.

Parent Action on Drugs (PAD) in Canada offers 10 ways to help teens deal with life's stresses, avoid problems and become strong and responsible individuals:

- Praise your teen often and sincerely for their efforts and the things they do well. Recognise their contributions to the household, to their school, and to the community.
- Discuss things with your teen and invite their opinions—even if they are different from your own.
- Find out, in a friendly way, where your teen is and who they are with.
- Let your teen know, in advance, what behaviour you expect from them.
- When your teen breaks family rules, make sure the consequences are consistent and fair.
- Be open to negotiating with your teen about family rules and consequences.
- Encourage your teen's school work and connect with the school to build a positive relationship and solve problems.
- Respect your teen's privacy and their need to express their uniqueness.
- Set an example by being responsible about your own use of alcohol and other drugs, the Internet, gambling and gaming, and model healthy personal relationships for your teen.
- Recognise that mistakes, your teen's and your own, can be valuable opportunities to learn

EXTRA TIP: There are many ways for a child to express their individuality, which is often in the way they dress or how they act with friends. Even if there are particular dress or behaviour codes within your community or religion, your child's personality and interest will be unique. It is important to respect this.

Good Communication

Good communication is key between you and your child. It is very important that children feel that they can speak to you and other family members about drugs and alcohol and about the possible risks of using them. There are a range of good resources that support families in improving their communication.

The [Australian Drug Foundation](#) outlines key steps to help start the conversation on substance abuse with your child:

Get the facts

There are many myths about alcohol and other drugs. It is better to use evidence-based sources such as those listed in the 'Know the Facts around Drugs and Alcohol' section below, rather than to rely on clichés such as "you will become an addict".

Be clear in your beliefs

Based on the evidence, clarify your view of alcohol and other drugs. For example, it's up to you whether your child drinks at home or not, but when making your decision consider the national laws around drinking.* Evidence shows that parental monitoring and family rules about alcohol do reduce the likelihood of young people drinking.

Look for opportunities to start the conversation

Use relevant topics on the TV and radio or people you see who might be affected by alcohol and drugs as an opportunity to talk about these issues. It's best to start talking about alcohol and drugs early. Try to have the conversation in a quiet and comfortable environment. It's never too early and there is no limit to the number of conversations you can have.

Ask questions

Find out your child's views about alcohol and other drugs. Talk about what they would do in different situations.

Make sure they understand the harms

Make sure you and your child have the right information about alcohol and other drugs and correct any myths. Don't exaggerate the harms as it will make you sound less credible; know the facts!

Set rules and consequences

Explain your views on alcohol and other drugs and use the facts to back them up. Let your child know your rules and the consequences for breaking them. Help them develop ways of getting out of situations where their friends are using alcohol or other drugs and they don't want to be embarrassed by not taking part.

EXTRA TIP: Good opportunities to talk may include- family meals, when on your way to school, work or social events together, when doing chores, sports or any other activity.

*Australian National Health and Medical Research Council's alcohol guidelines state that the safest option for people under 18 is not to drink.

Good Communication

The US Government Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers tips regarding the conversation on drinking, some of which we have listed below:

- **Show you care about your child's happiness and well-being**
 - Young people are more likely to listen when they know you're on their side. Try to reinforce why you don't want your child to drink—not just because you say so, but because you want your child to be happy and safe. The conversation will go a lot better if you're working with, and not against, your child.
- **Show you're paying attention and you'll notice if your child drinks**
 - You want to show you're keeping an eye on your child, because young people are more likely to drink if they think no one will notice. There are many subtle ways to do this without prying.
- **Keep it low-key**
 - You don't have to get everything across in one talk. Many small talks are better.

Talking about alcohol and drugs can sometimes be awkward and strained, it's important to have a balanced and calm conversation. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) offers guidelines to help parents reduce emotion when communicating. They offer the 'CALM steps' to help a parent keep the conversation moving in the right direction:

- C - Control your thoughts and your actions.
- A - Assess and decide if you are too upset to continue.
- L - Leave the situation if you are feeling too angry or upset.
- M- Make a plan to deal with the situation within 24 hours.

EXTRA TIPS: With your support, your child should feel able to handle social situations where drugs and alcohol are present and should feel confident in his/her choice not to engage in underage drinking or drug use.

If you have ever abused alcohol or drugs and your child asks you about your own use, focus on the fact that using did not make you a better person. You don't want your child leaving the conversation more intrigued to drink and try drugs than before you spoke.

In some communities alcohol may not be popular for religious or cultural reasons, but substance abuse occurs in all countries in different forms so it is still important to talk about it.

Further Resources: If you want to test if you are well-equipped to have a constructive conversation on underage drinking try SAMHSA's Start the Talk Game.

This other tool produced by SAMHSA provides some great tips and advice on what you can say to your child, tailoring guidance to your child's age and gender.

If you want to talk to a child under the age of ten, Parent Action on Drugs has developed some useful tips.

Monitoring your Child

Parents who keep track of their children are less likely to have children who make poor and unhealthy decisions.

Parent Action on Drugs notes some signs of when parents should start to be concerned:

- Changes in friends and/or being secretive about friends
- Changes in behaviour and attitude, becoming withdrawn, secretive or unfocused
- A drop in school attendance and grades or increased problems at school

EXTRA TIP: Start monitoring your child if you notice any new clothes, money or other things that you didn't give them.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers the following steps you can take to monitor your teen and help protect them from risky behaviours:

- Talk with your teen about your rules and expectations and explain the consequences for breaking the rules.
- Talk and listen to your teen often about how he or she feels and what he or she is thinking.
- Know who your teen's friends are.
- Talk with your teen about the plans he or she has with friends, what he or she is doing after school and where he or she will be going.
- Set expectations for when your teen will come home and expect a call if he or she is going to be late.
- Ask whether an adult will be present when your teen is visiting a friend's home.
- Get to know the parents of your teen's friends.
- Talk with your relatives, your neighbours, your teen's teachers, and other adults who know your teen. Ask them to share what they observe about your teen's behaviours, moods, or friends.
- Keep track of how your teen spends time online and talk about using the Internet safely.
- Pay attention to your teen's mood and behaviour at home and discuss any concerns you might have.
- If your teen does break a rule, enforce the consequences fairly and consistently.
- Make sure your teen knows how to contact you at all times.

Strong Relationships

Strong relationships with family and friends are key in helping young people avoid harm and to lead happy and healthy lives.

The Center for [Latino Adolescent and Family Health](#) proposes that the most important qualities of a good relationship are:

- Respect between two people
- Understanding the other person's feelings
- Being able to trust the other person
- Having concern for the other's well-being
- Knowing the other person (what the other person is like, what the other person wants, and what the other person likes and dislikes)

It's important for parents to encourage good friendships and ensure they know their children's friends. [Parent Action on Drugs](#) suggests you can encourage strong peer relationships by:

- Getting to know your teen's friends and appreciating their good qualities.
- Checking with your teen about where they are going and negotiating rules.
- Helping them to understand what healthy relationships are.
- Supporting your teen's ability to make choices and to take part in activities that may be different from those their friends choose.

EXTRA TIP: For example, agree a time that your child should come home, how they should contact you and agree suitable activities.

[NIDA](#) highlights the role of 'peer influence'. They note that young people do not always make wise choices when picking friends. Help them see what qualities they should value in friends- such as honesty, school involvement and respect. To decrease negative peer influence, parents and children should spend time together. Try these ideas:

- Play board/outdoor games
- Read with your child or tell family stories
- Encourage your child's interests (drawing, scientific curiosity, music, cooking etc)
- Include your child in social/cultural events in the community
- Include your child's friends in family activities

EXTRA TIP: Include your child in safe activities that you like to do for fun. This can be any child-friendly outdoor and indoor activity- from watching an appropriate TV show to playing sports.

Grandparents and Other Carers

Grandparents and other carers play an important role in the development of children and young people to prevent drug abuse.

Grandparents

Grandparents also have a significant impact on steering children away from risky behaviour. They can offer a fresh and different voice from parents, and can sometimes have special and less pressured relationships with their grandchildren. Here are some useful guides for grandparents to ensure they make the most of their influence:

[Australian Drug Foundation's](#) booklet explains how grandparents can communicate better with their teenage grandchild, learn about the latest drugs and discover how they can help keep their grandchild healthy.

They have also produced this [factsheet](#) guiding grandparents to support their grandchildren, especially if the grandparents' son/daughter has drug/alcohol problems. It offers self-help for grandparents and support for problem user parents and affected grandchildren.

Check out Mentor International's online [Parenting Resource](#) on discussing drugs and alcohol with your child:

You can find more useful resources using Mentor International's [Resource Finder](#).

Know the Facts around Drugs

The links below will equip you with up-to-date facts on drugs and alcohol, helping you have an informed conversation with your child:

Partnership for Drug Free Kids

Poster: Offers details around a range of drugs including street names, what they look like, how they're used and signs of abuse.

Parent Action on Drugs

Booklet: Provides statistics, facts and talking points on alcohol and drugs. Also offers 10 strategies for parents to help their teens make good decisions about alcohol and drugs.

Australian Drug Foundation

Online Tool: Provides a guide explaining how many standard drinks are in common containers of alcohol.

You can find more useful materials using Mentor International's online [Resource Finder](#).

The Australian Government's unit [Drug Aware](#) has produced a useful booklet providing facts on a range of drugs translated into a number of languages including Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish.

If you are struggling with finding resources in your language, feel free to contact us at info@preventionhub.org.

Section 2: School

Your child spends a lot of their time at school; it is there where they form many relationships with peers and teachers. If you are involved in their school life it will help your child develop positive relationships, learn key life skills and make the most of their education.

Parent Action on Drugs suggests some ways to do this:

- Knowing your teen's school and timetable
- Monitoring homework progress
- Encouraging participation in events and activities at school
- Supporting good study habits and encouraging them to meet deadlines
- Working with teachers and discussing any concerns
- Supporting your teen's individual abilities
- Finding supportive programmes if your teen finds school challenging

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests some more actions you can take at home and at school to help your child become more involved at school:

- Encourage your child to talk openly with you, teachers, and other school staff about his or her ideas, needs and worries.
- Find out what the school expects your child to learn and how your child should behave in school by talking to teachers and staff, attending school meetings and reading information the school sends home. Then, support these expectations at home.
- Help your child with homework, and teach your child how to use his or her time well. Make sure your child has the tools - books, supplies, a quiet place to work.
- Encourage your child to help adults at home, at school, and in the community, such as helping with chores and volunteering.
- Read school newsletters, attend parent-teacher-student meetings. Encourage your child to participate in school activities.
- Meet regularly with your child's teachers to discuss his or her grades, behaviour and accomplishments.
- As your schedule allows, help in your child's classroom or attend after school events.
- Offer to share important aspects of your culture with your child's class.
- Ask for materials that are translated into the language you speak at home and ask for interpreters to help you at school events.
- Ask whether your school provides, or could offer, programmes or classes to help you become more involved in your child's academic and school life.
- Talk with teachers and school staff to suggest simple changes that can make the school a more pleasant and welcoming place.

EXTRA TIP: If you speak a language not spoken at your child's school try and get support such as a translator at school or someone in your community to help you translate what is being communicated by your child's school. You can also ask the school if they can offer you any support with this.

Section 3: Community

Being involved and integrated in the community is really important and makes young people lead happier and safer lives.

Parent Action on Drugs argues that while some communities might provide a safer and more caring environment than others, all communities present opportunities for teens to get involved. If you help your teen to seek out positive opportunities in their community, you're likely to see their sense of self-worth increase as they realise that they really can have an impact.

You can help by:

- Seeking out and supporting organised events in the community that your teen can participate in.
- Helping your teen build healthy friendships beyond the school environment.
- Teaching your teen to give back to others in the community through volunteer experiences.
- Being a role model by having a positive influence in the community yourself.

EXTRA TIP: It is important to ensure that your child is proud of their heritage and has opportunities to share their cultural values, especially if you're from a minority group. Seize any opportunities as a parent to share important aspects of your culture with your child's class.

Taking part in sports offers your child a great way to be involved in the community, making friends and staying healthy. Be mindful of where and with whom your child plays sports (i.e. friends or sports clubs), as these can be crucial in having a positive or negative impact (i.e. in some countries, sports are linked with a heavy drinking culture).

The Australian Drug Foundation's 'Good Sports Programme' is a leading example of working with communities in Australia to ensure that local sports clubs encourage a responsible approach to alcohol and drugs. On average, drinking has dropped by 30% in participating clubs. Have a look to see if these guidelines might be useful when thinking about your child's sporting activities.

You can find more useful materials using our online [International Resource Finder](#).

We are very keen to receive comments and feedback on this resource. If you know of any new resources, research or materials that you think we should be aware of and/or should be included in this resource please contact us at hello@mentorinternational.org