



be real

alcohol, tobacco and drug-free kids



A Parent's Guide to Raising Drug-Free Children

www.berealteens.com

PREVENTIONFIRST
INCORPORATED



Dear Parent,

You are the single most important influence in keeping your children drug free. Research shows that the best way to keep children away from cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs is to begin when they are young, before they ever try them. The longer we can keep them from trying drugs, the more likely they will never become users.

It is also important to reach them in all areas of their lives — at home, at school, with their friends, and in the community.

That is what *Be Real* is all about. Your child may be hearing about *Be Real* in school or seeing our public-service announcements on TV or at movie theaters. This brochure will help you do your part at home.

The first step in helping your kids stay drug free is to relax and understand that it's really not as hard as you might think. You'll find comforting help here. Keep this as a reference as your children get older. You'll also find great information, including links to some of the best drug-prevention sites on the Web, at www.berealteens.com.

We're here to support you. Be a real parent. Do your part to keep your children drug free.

Sincerely,

Karel Ares
Executive Director
Prevention First Inc.

2800 Montvale Dr., Springfield, IL 62704 • 800.252.8951

720 N. Franklin St., Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60610 • 800.572.5385

★ What *Be Real* Is All About

Be Real is an award-winning drug-prevention campaign for 10- to 14-year-old youth. It works by encouraging and supporting drug-free lifestyles. It begins by letting kids know that, contrary to what they might think, most kids their age DO NOT smoke, drink, or use other drugs! This is a very important message for them to hear.

Be Real gets their attention by showing them real Illinois teens telling how they stay “real” and what they do to keep drug free. It tells them that a healthy lifestyle gives them the energy and enthusiasm to be real to themselves, their families, and their friends.

The program is designed to supplement and support other drug-prevention efforts in schools, homes, and communities. Schools get materials to use in the classroom and many youth groups plan *Be Real* activities. We also distribute public-service announcements to television stations and movie theaters throughout Illinois. Finally, this brochure gets you involved in keeping the *Be Real* message in front of children throughout their growing years.

★ How You Can *Be Real*

Begin by talking with your kids about your hopes and dreams for them and building a caring relationship based on honesty and mutual respect. Part of being real is also telling them your expectations that they will not use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Believe it or not, this is very effective. They really do listen, even if it doesn't always seem that way.

Be a good role model for them by being real to yourself. Eat healthy. Exercise. Pursue your dreams. Be a good friend and family member. They will notice.

Your Role

Be a parent — not a friend. Your children need you to care enough to set limits, tell them your expectations for good behavior, provide structure in their daily lives, and monitor where they are and who they are with. While these practices may sound hard to do, they don't have to be. Involve your children in setting limits you can all live with and be open to their ideas. That way you can be close without losing your authority as a parent.

Give them the right information. Your children will most likely learn early in life about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs from many places. Some of what they will hear, especially from friends, will be wrong or meant to encourage them to try drugs. Let your children know they can talk with you about the things they see and hear about drugs and that you'll help them get the right information. By being open, you will help them learn about the world around them in a safe, thoughtful way.

Recognize that one of the most often-mentioned reasons teenagers stay away from drugs is so they won't disappoint their parents! As your children grow, it is natural for them to want to make their own decisions about things that are important to them. You may think that you no longer have the influence over them you once had, but this is not true — kids, even teenagers, say that parents' opinions and feelings matter to them.

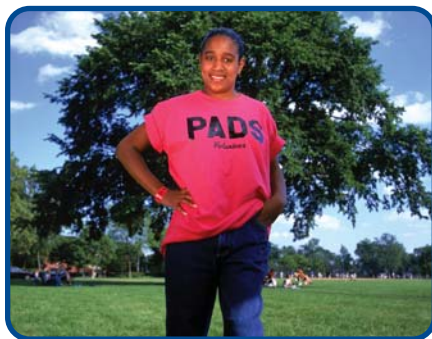
Define Drugs

When you hear the word "drugs," you most likely think of marijuana, ecstasy, heroin, or cocaine, but what about alcohol and tobacco? Because of their legal status for adults, these two substances are often overlooked when drugs are described. You must make it clear to your children that **alcohol and tobacco are drugs** and that these drugs are unhealthy and illegal for them. The effects of these drugs on children's lives can be as damaging as other drugs. Your children need to know what drugs are in order to avoid them.

Tell Your Children Why It Is Important Not to Use Drugs

Young bodies cannot process alcohol and other drugs as well as adults because many of their organs are not fully formed, even in the teen years. That means that drugs have more harmful effects more quickly in children and teens. These effects include:

- Permanent physical and mental damage from some drugs
- Delayed mental and physical development
- Increased likelihood of becoming addicted to the drug
- Delayed development of critical thinking and social skills



Kandra, volunteer

Know the Facts

It is important that you know the facts about alcohol and other drugs and that you can share these facts with your child.

You can find reliable information about drugs at www.drugfreeamerica.org and other Web sites listed on www.berealteens.com.

Create a Drug-Free Zone at Home

As adults, we have the legal right to use alcohol and tobacco. Regardless of whether you choose to drink alcohol or smoke, here are some dos and don'ts to help safeguard your children from experimenting with these and other drugs.

Don't

- Allow illegal drugs in your home.
- Have a drink the minute you get home after a hard day. (It teaches your child that having alcohol is a good way to relax.)
- Engage your child in your alcohol or tobacco use by asking them to get you a beer or light your cigarette.
- Encourage your kids or their friends to try alcohol or cigarettes, even with your supervision.

Do

- Offer guests in your home alternatives to alcoholic beverages.
- Find outlets for yourself other than drinking or smoking when you have had a difficult day or you feel stressed.
- Engage in social activities that don't involve alcohol.
- Establish a clear family position on drug use.
- Explain why young people should not drink alcohol or smoke tobacco.
- Communicate your values and beliefs about drug use to your children.
- Create activities for your children and spend time together as a family.
- Drink in moderation, which is defined as one or fewer drinks at a sitting for women and two or fewer drinks at a sitting for men.

Keep Talking

One conversation won't do it. Keep talking to your kids about this issue and don't avoid tough subjects. Use everyday situations as conversation

starters. For example, talk about a television show where drug use is shown or about a sports figure or celebrity who made bad choices about drug use. Ask your child what he or she thinks about the situation.



Elizabeth and Amanda, student ambassadors

Make sure that your talks are not one-sided conversations. Ask questions that are open-ended so that your kids have to respond with more than a "yes"

or "no" answer. Listen to your children and show that you respect their feelings about what they face at school and with friends. An effective way to communicate with your children is to frame the conversation around topics that interest them and are important to them, such as:

- **Appearance** — Smoking turns your teeth yellow, gives you bad breath, and makes your hair and clothes stink.
- **Physical and mental abilities** — Using drugs will make it hard for you to run, play sports, get good grades, etc.
- **Independence** — Breaking the rules about drug use has consequences.

Monitor Your Children

Knowing where and with whom your children are is a big help in keeping them away from drugs. Youth who are not regularly monitored by their parents are much more likely to use drugs. Although monitoring is one of the best ways to keep your children off drugs, it isn't always easy. Here are some steps you should take.

- Know where your children are at all times. Make sure they know you're asking out of love, not because of a lack of trust.
- Personally know all of your kids' friends and the parents of their friends. Having your children point out their friends from down the block isn't good enough. Know their faces and their voices and interact with them whenever possible.
- Find out your children's plans for the next day. If you're looking for something to discuss during dinner try, "So, what are you up to tomorrow?"
- Limit the time your child spends without adult supervision. The after-school hours of 4 to 6 p.m. are the most dangerous time for teens to be on their own. The potential for peer pressure or boredom leading to an after-school drug habit is huge. If you or another adult you trust can't be home with your teen, find out about after-school programs.

Places to check out include:

- YMCAs and YWCAs
- Park districts
- Schools
- Places of worship
- Libraries

Monitoring becomes critically important when your children reach middle school. Kids at this age are strongly influenced by the beliefs of their classmates, so peer pressure becomes a major factor in their behavior.

Monitoring doesn't mean you have to go through your kids' personal belongings. Experts agree that youth need an increasing amount of privacy as they get older. The balance between monitoring and privacy can shift if signs of drug use are present. When this happens, your child's privacy is less important than the need to seek professional help for him or her.

Be Honest

Conversations about drug use can get somewhat intense. You need to define your own values and ideas about drug use. If you drink or



Heath, baseball player

smoke, you are setting an example for your children to follow. It is very important that you guard against sending them a mixed message. It is important to explain why it's not okay for them to do these things, even though you do.

Your teen will likely challenge your logic and authority. You must be ready to answer questions with honesty and

respect. If you have used drugs in the past, decide how much you are willing to tell them about it and focus on what you learned that reinforces the need for them to be drug-free.

Counter Peer Pressure

The pressure to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs intensifies as your children get older. Here are some things you can do to help counter this pressure:

- Know your children's friends and their families. Talk to the parents of your kids' friends to be sure that they hold similar beliefs about teen drug use.
- If you find out your kids are involved with friends who may be using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, talk to them about ways to help their friends. Encourage them to try activities or social groups that support them staying drug free.
- Constantly praise your children for the decision to be drug-free and tell them you appreciate the positive things they do at home and school.

Easy Things You Can Do to Encourage a Drug-Free Lifestyle

- Monitor what your children watch on TV and see on the Internet.
- Know what's on the CDs your children buy and discuss the topics with them.
- Stay aware of your children's academic performance.
- Impose a curfew.
- Make it clear that you would be very upset if your teen uses any type of drug.
- Eat dinner with your kids six or seven days a week — make sure to turn off the TV.
- Assign your children regular chores.
- Have an adult present when your children get home from school.

★ Talking with Your 10- to 12-Year-Old

At this age, your children are beginning to question the information they receive from the world around them. You can still easily influence how they view that information. This is a good chance for you to reinforce their anti-drug beliefs by having open, thought-provoking discussions.

At this age, your children may be asked for the first time if they want to try alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.



Kimberly, swimmer

10 Steps to Help Your Kids *Be Real*

1. Talk with your children about drugs. Change ideas your children may have that “everybody” drinks, smokes, and uses other drugs.
2. Really listen to your kids. They are more likely to talk when parents give verbal and nonverbal cues that show they are listening.
3. Help your kids feel good about themselves. Children feel good when parents praise their efforts, not just accomplishments.
4. Help your children develop strong values. A strong value system can give kids the courage to do what’s right rather than go along with friends.
5. Be a good role model or example. Parents’ habits and attitudes strongly influence children’s ideas about drugs.
6. Help your kids deal with peer pressure. Children who have been taught to be kind and thoughtful to others may find it hard to say “no” to their friends.
7. Make family rules about children not using drugs, with specific punishments for using them.
8. Encourage healthy, creative activities. A reasonable level of hobbies, school events, and other activities may keep kids from using drugs out of boredom.
9. Team up with other parents. Join a support group or talk with your friends to share ideas and problems.
10. Know what to do if you suspect a problem. Learn to recognize the telltale signs of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use and get help immediately.

★ Talking with Your 13- to 14-Year-Old

It may surprise you that the average age youth in Illinois begin to use tobacco and alcohol is 13. It is at this age that your child needs your help the most. It is vital that you stay involved in their lives, even as they become more independent.

This is a time when their peer group has become very important to them and fitting in with the crowd is everything to them. They are gaining a sense of independence and giving you the impression that they would rather not have you around. While it may seem that you are not as important to them as their friends, you still have more power than you think to influence their values and decisions.

The suggestions listed in previous sections still work for this age group. You may need to change the limits you place on your children to allow them more independence. Continue to help them sort through their thoughts and feelings about drug use and other matters that are important to them. It is especially important during these years to know where they are, who they're with, and what they're doing.

★ Talking with Your 15- to 18-Year-Old

The teen years can be very challenging. Your kids are trying to figure out the kind of person they want to be. You may think that they no longer listen to you or care about what you think. But that's not true. You may be relieved to know that although teens' friends play an increasingly significant role in their lives, they say that a parent's influence is still important. When mothers and fathers are parents rather than pals, they can greatly reduce the risk of their children drinking, smoking, and using other drugs. So, hang in there. Stick with your efforts to maintain an open, caring relationship with your children, and it will pay off.

Continue to use the tips discussed earlier. In addition, develop an “escape plan” with your teen in case they end up at a party where alcohol or other drugs are present or their ride has been drinking or using drugs. Tell your teen he or she can call you at any time to have you pick him or her up, with no questions asked at the time. The next day, when you are both rested, discuss (don’t lecture about) what happened and encourage your teen to talk about what he or she learned from the experience. Review the family rules and praise your teen for following them, even in such difficult circumstances.

★ Signs and Symptoms

Even with your best efforts, some teens may still experiment with drugs. Here are some behaviors to watch for in your kids:

- Abrupt changes in work or school attendance, quality of work, work output, grades, discipline
- Unusual flare-ups or outbreaks of temper
- Withdrawal from responsibility
- General changes in overall attitude
- Deterioration of physical appearance and grooming
- Wearing of sunglasses at inappropriate times
- Continual wearing of long-sleeved garments particularly in hot weather or reluctance to wear short-sleeved attire when appropriate
- Association with known drug users
- Unusual borrowing of money from friends, co-workers, or parents
- Stealing small items from employer, home, or school
- Secretive behavior regarding actions and possessions; poorly concealed attempts to avoid attention and suspicion, such as frequent trips to storage rooms, restroom, basement, etc.

★ You Can Do It

Remember that you are not alone. Every parent faces the same issues with their children. Don't be afraid to seek support from your friends, your child's school, and your community. Your child's welfare is at stake. Be a real parent. Help your children be real, drug-free.

★ Prevention First Inc.

Prevention First Inc., which manages *Be Real*, is a training and information resource organization specializing in substance-abuse prevention and related issues, such as violence and teen pregnancy.

2800 Montvale Drive
Springfield, IL 62704-4294

720 N. Franklin St., Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60610

For more information, visit **www.prevention.org**.



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