

Recovery is POSSIBLE, IMPORTANT, and a NEW BEGINNING



March 5 is designated as Take Five Minutes to Talk to Your Kid's Day [<http://www.drugfreeinfo.org/take5.html>] in Iowa. This article offers evidence that you can make a difference and offers resources that you can use.

Parents can influence children's choices regarding drugs and alcohol

The great American humorist and writer Mark Twain once said, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years."

Contrary to what exasperated parents of teenagers may often think and feel, family attitudes and behaviors *do* play an important role in shaping the choices young people make. As the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) points out, a large body of research shows that, even during the teen years, parents have an enormous influence on their children's behaviors, values and decisions about drinking.

Now researchers at Iowa State University also say that a child's future alcohol use may be directly influenced by a parent's expectations about alcohol consumption. In analyzing data obtained from a series of interviews with about 800 Iowa mothers and their children, Stephanie Madon, ISU psychology professor and lead author, and a team of researchers found strong evidence that a mother's beliefs regarding her child's likelihood of using alcohol altered her child's self-view in either a positive or negative direction. In other words, if a mother believes her child will use alcohol, there is an increased likelihood that the belief will become reality.

"What people believe ultimately has an impact on what actually occurs," Madon said. "But it's not just because they believe it. It's not magic. When we believe something—even if it's wrong—and when we believe it's true, we act as though it is. And sometimes when you act as though something's true, your behaviors will cause the belief to become true. So I think the moral here is to help children develop positive and pro-social concepts about themselves, because children are likely to make choices that match how they view themselves."

It's never too early to begin the important job of nurturing a child's positive self-image. While that task may seem daunting, various government agencies offer free guides to help parents and caregivers promote healthy lifestyles and open up the lines of communication with children so they will make informed, responsible choices. For example, *Building Blocks for a Healthy Future* [<http://bblocks.samhsa.gov/>] is an early childhood substance abuse prevention program developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration designed for the parents of children age three to six. The materials are based on six action steps that relate directly to what researchers and prevention professionals term family-related "protective factors." *Building Blocks* teaches adults to better communicate with children; how to be more involved in their day-to-day activities; how to set and enforce rules; how to be positive role models; how to help children choose friends; and how to do regular check-ins with children.

Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol [<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/children.pdf>] is a booklet by NIAAA geared to parents and guardians of young people ages 10 to 14. Among other things, it provides strategies for communicating with teens about alcohol, ways to spot warning signs of potential drinking

problems, and the necessary actions to help teens resist alcohol. The authors say every conversation can be a "win-win" experience if adults communicate without lecturing, actively listen without interrupting, ask open-ended questions, and keep emotions in check when they hear something they don't like.

"When children have a strong bond with a parent, they are apt to feel good about themselves and therefore be less likely to give in to peer pressure to use alcohol," according to the booklet. "When the relationship between a parent and teen is full of conflict or is very distant, the teen is more likely to use alcohol and to develop drinking-related problems."

The Iowa Substance Abuse Information Center (ISAIC) offers a wide range of prevention resources for parents that can be viewed online; some may also be ordered in hard copy; visit <http://www.drugfreeinfo.org/litecommerce/cart.php>. Also visit the ISAIC Website page, Parent and Caregiver Resources [<http://www.drugfreeinfo.org/aparents.html>], for links to recommended Websites and publications.

Parenting is a tough job, but parents need to know that their positive efforts can translate into healthy behaviors. The tools and information provided by these and other resources should make the job a little easier.

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