DrugFree@WorkPlace

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America’s children are being subjected to pro-drug messages through both traditional and social media. Celebrities openly boast and joke about their drug use, and television shows glamorize the drug-using lifestyle. Add to this the intense peer pressure to use drugs that all adolescents experience, and it becomes obvious why so many parents are concerned about their child becoming addicted.

This month’s Employee Education Newsletter will present answers to some of the questions parents are asking.

Q: How can I counteract the pro-drug messages in today’s culture and keep my child drug free?
A: Talk with your children about drug use; don’t assume they know where you stand on the issue. Establish clear and consistent rules and consequences for use of alcohol or other drugs—and then follow through on those rules. Create family time on a frequent and regular basis; a sense of unity and shared goals reinforces your family’s bonds. Remain watchful, curious, interested, and involved in your teens’ lives and find ways to start conversations even if it seems they do not want to talk. Stay connected with the parents of your children’s friends and check in regularly about activities, events, and other plans.

Q: What can I do if I suspect drug use at my child’s school and/or at afterschool parties?
A: Realize that drug use is in fact happening in schools. Partner with the school through the PTA and other parents/caregivers in establishing a No Alcohol or Other Drug Policy for parties, vacations, and other activities and require that participants sign an agreement. Allow attendance only at parties where the policy is in effect and will be enforced. Involve the school or local law enforcement when information about alcohol and other drug use is discovered. Show up unexpectedly at parties along with other parents to make sure everyone is acting in a safe manner.

Q: How can I help my child deal with the peer pressure to use drugs?
A: Give your teens an “out” to avoid dangerous situations. Be the excuse for why they can’t use (“I’m cool, but I can’t get high; my parents drug test me”). Offer to pick them up from a party, no questions asked. Don’t get drunk, stoned or high in front of your children. If you drink, don’t do so in front of your kids and if you must drink, always model responsible use of alcohol.

Q: What should I do if my child is using drugs?
A: Don’t confront your child about drinking or other drug use while he or she is under the influence. Wait until he or she is sober. Don’t make excuses for your teen’s drinking or other drug use—for example, don’t write notes to cover up tardiness or unexcused absences from school. Covering for the abusing person only prolongs the problem. Don’t take responsibility for your child’s drinking or other drug problem; a parent’s or caregiver’s job is to get help for the child. Whether your child responds to or accepts that help is out of your control.

Q: What if my child is being abusive?
A: Don’t accept as normal the behavior of a drunk or drug-abusing teen. Your child should treat you and your home with respect. For example, do not tolerate any threats of violence. Call the authorities.

Q: How should I react if I confirm my child’s drug use?
A: Don’t nag or scream at your child about drinking or other drug use. It may just offer an added reason to use, but don’t clean up your abusing child’s messes and predicaments either. Feeling the pain of consequences can be a motivator for change. It is important that you not let your drug-using child’s behavior influence how you will behave. Don’t view or accuse your child of lacking backbone or willpower. Addiction is a disease. People need professional help to recover.

Q: What if my child gets angry at me and/or threatens to leave if I require he stop using drugs?
A: Don’t assume your child doesn’t love you because of the way he or she acts. Realize that professional help will be needed for your child, and for yourself and your family. Talk with a school counselor, family physician, or therapist. Have your child evaluated for a substance use disorder or consider getting professional help to do an intervention. Consider attending Al-Anon or Nar-Anon meetings to gain support for yourself as you deal with your teen’s use.

To help us combat substance abuse, go to www.LiveDrugFree.org and click on “Donate!”
Q: If my child is addicted, will he ever be able to stop using drugs?

A: Yes! Through scientific advances, we know more than ever before about how drugs work in the brain. We also know that addiction can be successfully treated to help young people stop abusing drugs and lead productive lives. But intervening early when you first spot signs of drug use in your teen is critical; don’t wait for your teen to become addicted before you seek help. However, if a teen is addicted, treatment must be the next step.

Q: Won’t my child “grow out of it” and stop using drugs on his own?

A: Not if he is addicted. Repeated drug use changes the brain. Brain-imaging studies of people with drug addictions show changes in areas of the brain that are critical to judgment, decision making, learning and memory, and behavior control. Quitting is difficult, even for those who feel ready. Realize that the inability to stop using drugs is not a moral failing, but rather an illness that needs to be treated.

Q: What will happen to my child if he enters treatment?

A: Once a person is in treatment, whether it is outpatient or inpatient, the staff and setting there will begin to work to instill a sense of hope. Hope is foundational to recovery. Incoming patients will be stabilized medically and emotionally. Some will need to go through a physical withdrawal. A mental withdrawal also needs to take place. Usually these initial withdrawal stages are closely monitored by a team of doctors and nurses for at least the first 24 hours. Once patients reach a calm state in which they can think more clearly, without the effects of substances, they are given the space and time to take a realistic look at their lives. They are provided with a respectful, supportive environment in which they can make life changes. Each patient will usually receive a thorough assessment in the first few days of treatment. It is best if a holistic team approach is taken and every aspect of a patient’s life is evaluated: physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and intellectual. This information, including substance-use history, is combined to form a patient profile and an individualized recovery plan.

Key issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and grief are addressed. Some patients may have coexisting problems such as clinical depression or a history of sexual abuse that need to be addressed as well. The type of treatment varies. But whether it is inpatient or outpatient, the treatment usually consists of one-to-one time with a counselor and support from a group of patients. The group is usually diverse and includes some people who are well along in their recovery, those just starting to make progress, and new—often skeptical—patients. In this setting, the peer group becomes a critical therapeutic element.

Q: What is the first step if I find out my child is using drugs?

A: You can start by bringing your child to a doctor who can screen for signs of drug use and other related health conditions. You might want to ask your child’s doctor in advance if he or she is comfortable screening for drug use with standard assessment tools and making a referral to an appropriate treatment provider. If not, ask for a referral to another doctor skilled in these issues. You can also contact an addiction specialist directly. There are 3,500 board certified physicians who specialize in addiction in the United States.

Q: What kind of screening will the doctor do?

A: The doctor will ask your child a series of questions about use of alcohol and drugs and associated risk behaviors such as driving under the influence or riding with other drivers who have been using drugs or alcohol. The doctor might also do a urine and/or blood test to identify drugs that are being abused. This assessment will help the doctor determine the extent of a teen’s drug use (if any) and whether a referral to a treatment program is necessary.

Q: How do I find the right treatment center?

A: If you or your medical specialist decides your teen can benefit from substance abuse treatment, there are many options available. You can start by contacting the government’s Treatment Locator service at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or go online at http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/.