

**Keeping Teens Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco-Free:  
Parenting Policies, Rules and Signs of Love  
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There are concrete things you can do as a parent to keep your children away from drugs, alcohol and tobacco. There is no guarantee that with the most motivated parents, a child won't gravitate to the lure of experimenting and then habitually using drugs and alcohol. But, with effort and love, many parents are proud of the results they get when they stay close their kids throughout the teen years. Below are some general ideas for parenting. These ideas are important for keeping kids away from many harmful influences, not just alcohol and drugs.

It is helpful, first and foremost, to limit your child's exposure to alcohol use (and, of course drugs and tobacco). Children learn that substance use is accepted, even desirable, when they are frequently around parents, adults and family members who are drinking. They expect that when their time comes, they will be able to get drunk with the adults. And, like many other adult-like privileges, they will seek out the "thrill" before they come of age. Drinking while at family gatherings is common, especially for celebrations. If you must drink, limit your use so that you can show your children a model of moderate use.

Talking about substance use as a potential problem is important —and it must come from YOU. Talk to your children about the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol —on physical and emotional health. Talk about the lives you have seen affected or destroyed by substance use and dependence. You can begin having these discussions when your children are in elementary school and especially when they ask questions about why an adult is acting funny in a movie. Explain how adults misuse alcohol to manage feelings and problems which are better managed directly. Talk about how the media glorifies alcohol use. If you disapprove, express that.

The main place that children get alcohol and tobacco is at home. Lock alcohol up and make it inaccessible to teens who may be in your house. This can begin as early as age 12. Beers in the fridge can disappear without your knowledge. It can be wise only to shop for alcohol when you are entertaining and send the remainder home with guests. This is not to say that your children will sneak alcohol from your stores. It is to point out that providing children the opportunity is a temptation that can easily be avoided.

Supervision is important to preventing many situations that affect your teen. Leaving a group of unsupervised teens alone in your house (or allowing your teen to go to a house where there is no adult supervision) puts those teens in a difficult position. Friends can encourage them to engage in activities that they would not normally tolerate, including viewing pornographic movies on TV, using items you have forbidden and finally, sampling alcohol. Although 12–13 year olds can be left alone, it is not recommended that you do that for long periods of time, and not when their friends are over visiting. Your 12 and 13 year olds need your supervision even when you are *in* the home, so check in on them at regular intervals. This prevents them from getting into trouble with you.

Encourage (you can require) your children to be involved in their school. Schools have activities for kids who are not athletic, including music, environmental science, forensics, drama, art, computer programming, chess etc. Kids who have things to do after school tend to be occupied and inspired. Meanwhile, children who are not involved in other things have too much time on their hands. Some kids are into ballet, gymnastics, hockey or other sports that are not connected to school. These activities give your child an identity outside of school which is part of their forming self-concept. Many kids will avoid alcohol/drug use because they are committed to being healthy for their activities.

Teenagers with a lot of disposable income can easily buy drugs and alcohol. Encourage your child to put earned money and Christmas money in a savings account. Agree on how much "mad" money they are allowed to have at one time. Ask your children to account for money they had that seemed to evaporate.

Be consistent in demanding to know their whereabouts at all times. The 5 W's are what, who, where, when, and why. You are entitled to know these things. Train your kids early on that their job is to keep you fully informed. This tends to foil unhealthy plans they may have. Equip your children with cell phones for social outings, but in order to assure that they are where they say they are, always demand to know the "landline phone number" of their location. Be sure to call that number.

Have a policy that your children do not "hang" with people you do not know. Make it their job to introduce and bring new friends over to your house. Spend time with those kids, no matter how awkward they make it for you. Invite those friends to eat meals with you. Teens who visit your house can develop a relationship with you that is separate from their parental relationships. This can be a deterrent for them.

If your child is caught using alcohol or drugs, don't take a helpless posture about it. Remove their driver's license and driving privileges. If the people they used with are at their job, it is acceptable to require them to quit that job. This is up to you. Grounding a teen from friends that use alcohol is an essential action. It sends the message that their choice of friends is in your jurisdiction. Call up parents of kids that your child has used with. Team up together to set limits with all involved parties. Hold your child responsible for any underage drinking fines. Don't be afraid to cry in front of your teens if they get drunk and create a huge mess in their lives. This shows them your abiding love and concern.

Don't be afraid to require that your teen meet with an AODA counselor. This is someone who specializes in drugs and alcohol evaluation and treatment. There is evidence that contact with such a professional can provide valuable education to a teenager about the process of developing an addiction. If your teen continues to use drugs and alcohol, require their participation in treatment.

Don't be discouraged by your teen's moodiness and distance at this age. Push your unending love on them! Always show interest in their lives and what they talk about. They will continue to come to you. Avoid lecturing and yelling. You are pushing your teen away when you do that stuff. Be prepared to have them share their secrets with you without "freaking out". Freaking out breaks their trust and causes them to go underground with problems. Communication really is the ANTI-DRUG.

For more parenting resources, check out our website at [www.dollandassociates.com](http://www.dollandassociates.com). It is full of ideas and links to other websites for families.