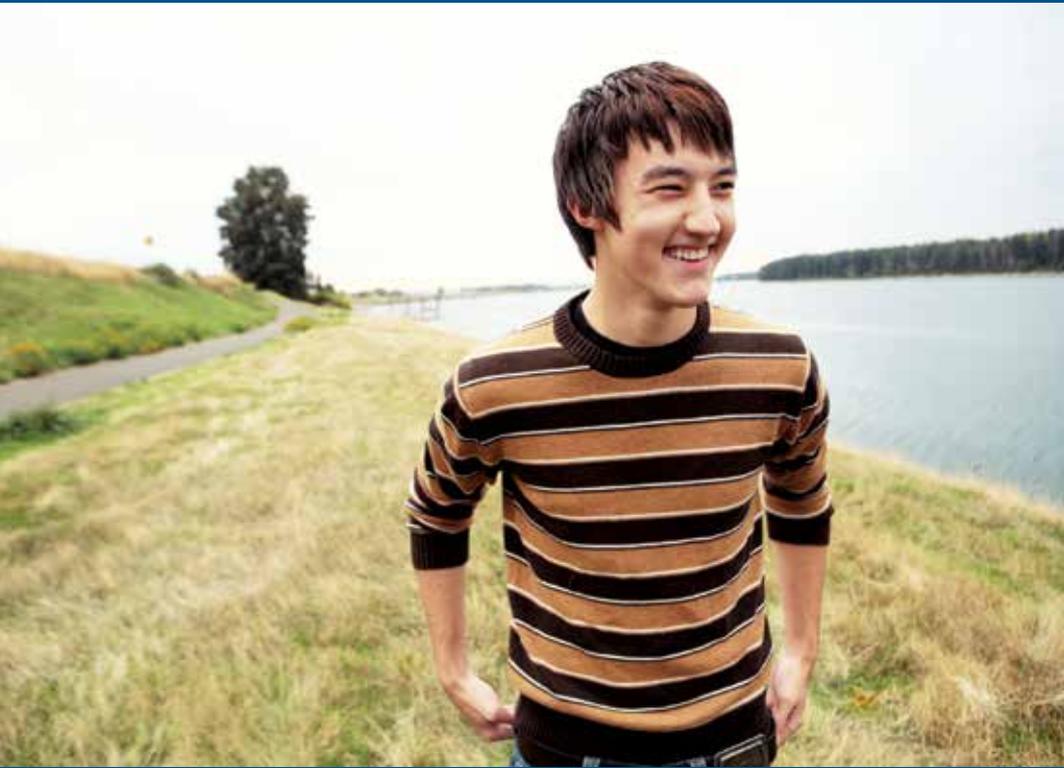


Parents Matter: You Can Influence Your Children's Views On Alcohol and Drugs



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As a parent or guardian, it's important to think about what role you play in shaping your children's values and life experiences so that they avoid misusing alcohol and drugs. Parents can help protect children from harm by: striving to form close relationships with their children, being open to discussions, having clear expectations, and being consistent with discipline and consequences.

**Note: "Parent" also refers to "guardian" within this document.*

Be a positive role model

Parents can have a major impact on their child's potential future alcohol and drug use. For instance, children learn about drinking (how, where and why) from adults. You have the ability to guide some of their decisions and to be a good role model. Just as your parents influenced you, your children will take on your values and start to act like you. Children listen to you and watch what you do. They will notice how you deal with problems, express your feelings, and celebrate special occasions.

Set a good example

Behaviours can send strong messages. Children pay attention to your behaviour and will often follow your example. Try your best to lead by setting a positive example. Avoid reaching for an alcoholic drink when you arrive home from a difficult day, as this sends the message that drinking is a good way to relax or unwind. When hosting a dinner, if you are offering alcohol to your adult guests, also offer non-alcoholic drinks. Remember that taking illegal drugs or knowingly taking prescription drugs incorrectly (e.g., doubling or skipping doses, lending to others) suggests to your child that this is the right thing to do. Ensure that your behaviour matches your beliefs.

Handle mistakes gracefully

Your behaviour, both good and bad, will be seen by your children as an example of how to live their lives. Keep in mind that no one is perfect. Parents make mistakes like everyone else. When you make a mistake, admit it and apologize. This teaches children that they don't have to be "perfect" and that mistakes are a part of learning.

Have a strong parent-child relationship



Having a strong, trusting relationship with your child is the best way to influence him/her to avoid drinking alcohol and using drugs. Teens are more likely to delay drinking when they have a close relationship with a parent or guardian. A

close relationship with your child may help protect your son or daughter from developing alcohol-related problems if they do begin to drink.

When children feel good about themselves they are less likely to give in to peer pressure.

Tips on how to build and maintain a strong bond with your child

- *Show that you care.* Children need to know how important they are to you. Make an effort to spend one-on-one time with your child on a regular basis by doing things they like to do. Find activities to share such as playing a game, going for a walk or bike ride, talking about a recent movie, or making a meal together.
- *Be accepting.* Ensure that your child knows you appreciate his/her efforts and accomplishments. Don't tease or criticize in hurtful ways.

- *Understand that your child is growing up.* Respect your teen’s need for independence and privacy but continue to guide your child’s behavior as he/she grows up.
- *Have open communication.* Create an environment where it is easy for your child to talk honestly with you about anything. See *Talking Matters* booklet for details.
- *Have family meals together.* Ask family members not to bring their cell phones to the table and don’t allow texting or phone calls during this time. Tell your family about your day (what you did, what your thoughts and feelings were) and ask others about theirs.
- *Have family traditions.* Celebrate birthdays and other holidays. This helps your child feel connected to your family and builds memories.
- *Avoid labelling.* If your child has done something you don’t like or disagree with, don’t label him/her as being “bad”. Instead let your child know that it is his/her *behaviour* you don’t like.
- *Be clear about what you expect.* Make sure that you have realistic expectations of your child. Don’t expect perfection but do expect that your child will try his/her best. This can be in regards to their behaviours, school marks, homework times, how much time they spend with the family, chores, and curfews. Also talk about your values, expectations and rules regarding alcohol and drug use.
- *Set guidelines and strive to agree.* Decide together what the consequences will be if rules/guidelines are not followed. If your child is a part of these decisions he/she may be more likely to abide by them. Follow through with consequences.



Keep yourself in the picture

As children get older, parents tend to monitor their activities less, giving them more freedom. It's okay to allow your children to learn some things on their own and gain independence as they get older. However, keep in mind that they won't always ask for your help when they need guidance. Be there to offer support, but don't overprotect or solve problems for them. It's a fine balance.

Children want to live up to your expectations to maintain their close connection with you.

Stay involved and informed

As friends become a greater part of their lives it's important to stay involved and aware of what your children are up to.

Here are some suggestions:

- Have your child invite his/her friends over. Get to know who your child spends time with.
- Meet your child's friends' parents if possible. Invite them to events and make them a part of your life in some way.
- Always know where your children are and who they are with, even if they are older teens.
- Have household rules about alcohol/drug use based on your own values.

Four ways to help your children make wise decisions

Help them...

...build self-esteem and self-acceptance

You can do many things to enhance your child's sense of well-being and self-image. Make efforts to:

- Offer praise for jobs well done, even small things such as hanging up their jacket or putting clothes into the laundry.
- Talk about actions, not the person, when giving constructive criticism. Choose your words carefully. Say something like "I think you spelled that wrong. Let's try again."
- Assign age appropriate do-able tasks like feeding the dog or clearing the table so your child can learn how to work together as a family.
- Tell your child that you love him/her, often.

...develop critical thinking skills

Critical thinkers don't simply accept the facts; they think about situations and explore all options. Teens that are able to critically analyze situations are better able to say "no" to people who encourage them to drink alcohol or use drugs.

Practice with your kids:

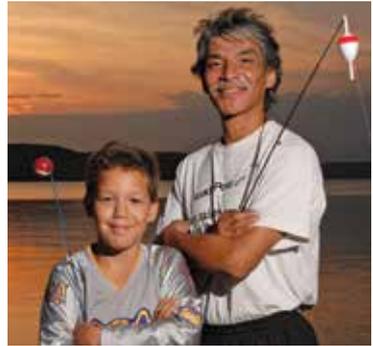
- Ask them to explain things so that they develop critical thinking skills. This helps children consider situations from all angles and can help them make decisions that are well thought out. Help them develop this skill with questions such as "What made you decide that?" "Why do you think that's true?"
- Help your child think about how others might view things differently.
- Suggest "what-if" scenarios. Ask "what do you think could happen if...?" or "would a different choice lead to a different result?"

Reach out to your children, support them, encourage them and let them know what they mean to you. Get to know your child's interests, friends, dreams and hopes.

...with independence and decisions

Encourage your children to be independent, as it is a natural part of growing up. For example, have your child pick out his/her own clothes to wear or buy (depending on their age), or have your older child learn to pay his/her own cell phone bills.

Teach your children how your values have helped you make good decisions and how this helped you deal with peer pressure when you were young.



Give your children opportunities to practice making choices. Give them a chance to think about how their actions will affect them and others around them. Help your child realize that life offers them many choices and that they can learn to trust their decisions. It is through practice that children learn how to make respectful, realistic and responsible choices.

Talk to your children about goals and hopes, and about how their decisions can help them reach their dreams.

...learn how to deal with peer pressure

- Talk about what makes a good friend.
- Listen to your children's concerns and try to understand their feelings when they are being pressured by others to drink alcohol/take drugs. Know that this can be difficult for them.
- If you talk about their concerns without judging them, your children will be more likely to continue coming to you with their issues as they get older.
- It's not enough to simply tell you children to avoid alcohol and drugs. Together, you need to brainstorm how to handle different situations. Help them think of what to say when someone is trying to pressure them into doing something they don't want to.

Give them good reasons not to drink alcohol or use drugs

Some reasons include telling them that:

- you care about their health and well-being;
- it could help to maintain their self-respect, as they would avoid risky situations that they could regret later;
- it's illegal to drink alcohol when underage;
- there are dangers related to alcohol/drug use. Their bodies and brains are still growing and developing which puts them at risk of harm; and
- your family has a history of substance misuse (if this is true), which could put them at risk.

Throughout their lives, children rely on parents and other adults to help them learn about the world and about what behaviours and attitudes are acceptable. Be there for your children. Let them know that: they are important, their opinions count, they deserve to be treated with respect, and that you will always love them. Provide the guidance they need. Consider your own values and how you show this. Showing your best behaviours helps them to show theirs.

Be there for your children to help them through difficult times.

Remember... kids listen and watch you more than you may think.

To access parenting booklet sources
please contact the Saskatchewan
Ministry of Health at (306) 787-7239.

saskatchewan.ca/addictions

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