

RAISING DRUG-FREE CHILDREN

Parents and Community Shape Behavior

A study by the Johnson Institute concludes that parents - specifically the limits they set for their children regarding alcohol use messages - are major factors affecting alcohol use by their children.

The Johnson Institute of Minnesota, which works to prevent alcohol and other drug problems in schools and in the workplace, asked students in communities across the country whether their parents had taken a firm stand against the use of alcohol. The results showed that less than one-third of the 10th-graders had received a clear "don't drink" message from their parents.

Survey data also showed:

When parents bargain with their children - such as allowing teens to drink if they promise not to drive impaired - the children are more likely to drive when they have been drinking, or to be in a car driven by someone who has been drinking.

When teens are allowed to drink alcoholic beverages at home, they are more likely to use alcohol and other drugs outside of the home, and they are more likely to develop alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) related behavioral and health problems.

Peer pressure is not the tremendous motivator that many believe. The data showed no significant link between students who say they are anxious about peer pressure and those who say they have problems- social, legal or medical - with alcohol and other drugs.

Parents continue to be the first and best source of prevention education for their children. The examples, education, and values parents provide have a tremendous influence on the child's view of the acceptability of using alcohol and other drugs.

Many parents in this country are working hard to raise their children in a manner that will help protect them from experiencing ATOD problems. However, without community support, the task is difficult, lonely, and sometimes impossible. The mixed messages from society undermine parents and provide serious risks for our youth.

Adult and community attitudes and behaviors become increasingly powerful influences as children grow through adolescence. No matter how much parents have done, there are forces beyond a parent's control.

Some parents are finding support through community organizations, partnerships, and coalitions. Parents, working with other parents and citizens, can reinforce their own beliefs that setting limits and giving clear messages is the right thing to do.

Parents can also find ways to become key players in setting community norms, making a difficult task easier for themselves and other parents.

George T. Watkins, editor-in-chief of *Student Assistance Journal*, offers these suggestions for parents:

Set an example of low-risk use of alcohol and other legal drugs in your own lives, and refrain from the use of all illegal drugs.

Interact with other adults to encourage age-appropriate behavior, offering positive role models for your children.

Set reasonable, yet firm limits for your children's behavior, and teach them responsibility for their actions.

Take positions of "no use" of alcohol or other drugs. Set guidelines for curfews, dating, sleepovers, bedtime and study time. Hold that line in the face of bickering, blackmail, or other tactics your children will use to get their own way.

Watkins states that most children are ready and waiting for their parents to take a firm stand with them in saying "no" to alcohol and other drugs.

**Peer pressure is not
the tremendous
motivator that
many believe.
Parents and the
community shape the
behavior of our children.**

REV. 10/09