

Editorial



Guest editorial

Help youth fight substance abuse

by the American Academy of Pediatrics

More than 90 percent of adolescents in the United States will have used alcohol before they graduate from high school. About five percent of our high school seniors use either marijuana or alcohol *daily*. And 20 percent of high school seniors smoke cigarettes daily.

Substance abuse often begins before a child enters high school. The percentage of students using drugs by the sixth grade has *tripled* since 1975. And 10 times as many seniors report that they began drinking before leaving the sixth grade as did a decade ago.

Because of this nation's devastating substance abuse problem, our children will not be able to reach a healthy, productive adulthood without our help. Parents can play an integral role in helping their child avoid drugs and alcohol. In fact, three parental factors can help predict a child's initiation into drug use. They are: parents' drug-using behaviors, parental attitudes about drugs and parent-child interaction.

Positive family relationships and attachments appear to discourage adolescents' initiation into substance use. Children whose parents provide discipline with warmth and a willingness to discuss the rationale and consequences of behavior tend to stay away from drugs.

If you suspect your child is abusing drugs or alcohol, watch for these behaviors associated with the stages of abuse. Some of these include:

- Many hours spent alone in his bedroom.
- Resistance in talking with you or persistently isolating himself from the family.
- A definite, noticeable change in attitude at school, with friends, and at home.
- Pronounced mood swings with increased irritability and angry outbursts.
- Lying in order to cover up sources of money and possessions — stealing, shoplifting or encounters with the police.
- Quitting a school sport, band or orchestra; dropping out of school clubs, social groups; lost interest in a hobby.
- Unpredictable, rebellious behavior, being a "con artist," acting untrustworthy, insincere and paranoid.

Being able to "see" or read these behaviors in your children could help you stop their abusive behavior before it escalates and becomes even more harmful. The ultimate goal is that your children and all children will stay drug free. Provide your children with love and support as they attempt to grow up in an environment where the dangers of substance abuse are ever present.

