

PARENTS.

THE ANTI-DRUG.

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Keeping Your Teens Drug-Free: A Family Guide
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Keeping Your Teens Drug-Free A Guide for African American Parents and Caregivers

Office of National Drug Control Policy | National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign

Your Words and Actions Matter

Whether you are a parent, grandparent or simply someone who cares about the future of a teen in your life, you know the importance of keeping young people drug-free. But it isn't always easy, especially when teens are getting mixed messages about drugs from music, movies, television and even their friends. As an African American parent, you pride yourself on doing a good job supervising your teens, providing discipline and setting rules. Perhaps this style of parenting is why African American teens overall have lower rates of drug use than any other population studied in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, except Asian American teens.

According to the Monitoring the Future study, younger (8th grade) African American teens are catching up to white teens when it comes to marijuana: 13 percent of African American and 14.5 percent of white teens report having used marijuana in the past year. In addition, one out of six (17.8 percent) African American teens has tried marijuana at least once (National Survey on Drug Use and Health).

Teen marijuana use is not something parents should just accept as part of today's teen culture. With a little extra effort, a greater commitment to monitoring teens and setting clear "no marijuana" rules, you can help keep your teen drug-free. This booklet can help you be clear about the risks of teen drug use in the African American community and take steps to keep teens away from drugs.

Why do you need to know the facts? Research shows that teens who learn about the risks of drug use from their parents or caregivers are less likely to use drugs than those who do not. Two-thirds of teens fear that they will upset their parents or lose the respect of family and friends if they smoke weed or use other drugs. Young people need to hear about drug dangers from you. The bottom line: **You Matter.**



Where to Get Help

If your child is using drugs, find out why. Perhaps your teen is going through a rough time at school or at home or in dealing with peer pressure. Regardless of the reason, let your child know that you do not approve of drug use. Set a punishment such as no contact with friends for a week or so or take away things that matter to them for a time, e.g., cell phone, MP3 player, video games, etc. Make it clear that if there is a next time the punishment will be even tougher.

If your child is repeatedly using drugs, there is help available. In most communities, you can get help from a counselor at your child's school, your pediatrician, nurse or other health care provider or your faith community. You can also visit www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

Don't Give Up

You've worked hard to teach your child right from wrong. And now, your teen is starting to make his or her own choices. However, it's important that you continue to provide guidance. Be clear about drug dangers, and monitor your teen to help keep him or her drug-free.

Marijuana Causes Problems

Teens today are using drugs at younger and younger ages, when their brains and bodies are still developing. Of all of the illicit drugs, marijuana is the most widely used. If your child is exposed to drugs, he or she will most likely be offered marijuana.

- Some frequent, long-term marijuana users show signs of a lack of motivation (amotivational syndrome). Their problems include not caring about what happens in their lives and a lack of concern about how they look. As a result of these symptoms, some users tend to perform poorly in school or at work.
- Heavy or daily use of marijuana affects the parts of the brain that control memory, attention and learning and can make it more difficult to learn and perform tasks that call for more than one or two steps.
- Smoking marijuana causes some changes in the brain that are like those caused by cocaine, heroin and alcohol. Scientists are still learning about the many ways that marijuana can affect the brain.
- One joint can deliver four times as much cancer-causing tar as one tobacco cigarette.
- In a study conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a moderate dose of marijuana alone was shown to impair driving performance; the effects of a low dose of marijuana combined with alcohol were markedly greater than for either substance alone.



- While not everyone who uses marijuana becomes addicted, when a user begins to seek out and take the drug compulsively, that person is said to be dependent on the drug or addicted to it. In 2002, more than 280,000 people entering drug treatment programs reported marijuana as their primary drug of abuse, showing they needed help to stop using it. Some heavy users of marijuana show signs of withdrawal when they stop using the drug. They develop symptoms such as restlessness, loss of appetite, trouble sleeping, weight loss and shaky hands.
- The marijuana that teens use today has more than twice the concentration of THC, the chemical that affects the brain, than the marijuana of 20 years ago.
- Young people who use marijuana weekly have double the risk of depression later in life, and teens who smoke marijuana weekly are three times more likely than non-users to have suicidal thoughts. Marijuana use in some teens has been linked to increased risk for schizophrenia in later years.



Other Substances

- Underage drinking can cause many problems for young bodies and brains. Alcohol use during the teen years can interfere with important developmental processes and can cause problems with thinking and learning.

Beware of Messages That Encourage Drug Use

Many African American parents are concerned about messages on television, in movies and music that encourage or trivialize drug use and fail to show the negative things that can happen when teens get involved with drugs. Parents, you have power. You can set rules about what your kids watch on television, the movies they go to or the songs they listen to. Keep in mind that teens can not only find Web sites that promote drugs, but they can also buy drugs over the Internet. You should let your kids know that you are in charge of their time online.

Watching television or going to the movies with your kids might be a good time to talk to them. For instance, if a character in a movie or video is doing drugs, you could use this as a chance to have a conversation by asking, “I wonder what his family thinks about that?” or “How do you think she will end up in life?”

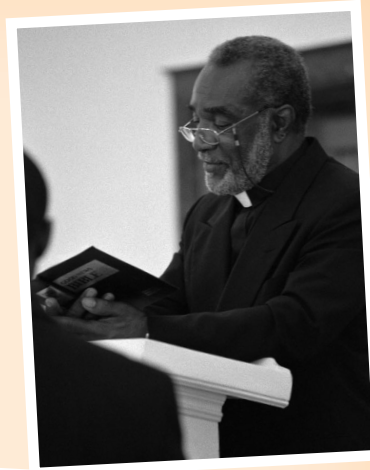
What If You Suspect Drug Use?

It’s not always easy to tell when teens are using drugs, because many signs or symptoms are common for youth this age. While there is no single warning sign for drug or alcohol use, some signs to look for include:

- Skipping classes or not doing well in school
- Hostility or lack of cooperation
- Borrowing money often, or suddenly having extra cash
- Significant mood changes
- Change in friends
- Unusual odors on their clothes or in their room
- Physical changes (red eyes, runny nose)
- Lack of interest in activities
- Loss of interest in personal appearance
- Heightened secrecy about actions or possessions

Get Help From Your Relatives, Friends and Neighbors. Take advantage of grandparents, aunts, cousins, brothers and sisters and ask for help from neighbors and even members of your faith community. These trusted adults can help you monitor your child and affirm your “no drug” rules.

- Ask friends and family to stop by when you are not home, or to keep an eye on what is going on at your house. A caring neighbor can be your best friend.
- Know the parents of your teen’s friends. Develop relationships and phone trees with these parents so that you can easily call to check up on your child and, in turn, encourage friends’ parents to call you as well.
- Find out which adults your child trusts and looks up to, and make sure they know your desires to keep your child drug-free.



Again, set firm “no-marijuana” rules, and set clear consequences for breaking them. Remind your teen of the consequences before he or she goes out. Teens need rules in order to resist peer and other pressures to use drugs. African American parents tend to make stringent rules about school, sex, respect, chores and phone privileges. Respect is a cardinal rule. Marijuana tends to be an “unspoken” rule that needs to be spoken about. So be clear about your rules, and don’t be afraid to enforce them. Of course, it is also a smart idea to praise your teen and reward good behavior for abiding by your rules.

- MDMA (ecstasy, XTC, X, Adam, hug, beans, love drug) is a drug that creates feelings of emotional warmth, mental stimulation, enhanced sensory perception and increased physical energy. MDMA can be dangerous to health, however, and, on rare occasions, lethal. People who abuse MDMA can experience increases in heart rate and blood pressure and other symptoms such as muscle tension, involuntary teeth-clenching, nausea, blurred vision, faintness and chills or sweating. In high doses, MDMA can interfere with the body’s ability to regulate temperature. This can lead to a sharp increase in body temperature (hyperthermia), resulting in liver, kidney and cardiovascular system failure.
- Methamphetamine (meth, speed, chalk, ice, crystal, glass) is a very toxic stimulant associated with serious health conditions, including potential heart and neurological damage, psychotic behavior, memory loss and aggression. It also contributes to increased transmission of infectious diseases, especially hepatitis and HIV/AIDS.
- Other substances abused by children and teens may be found in the home. These toxic substances are collectively referred to as inhalants — breathable chemical vapors that produce mind-altering effects. A variety of common products contain substances that can be inhaled. Many people do not know or understand that products such as spray paints, nail polish remover, hair spray, glues and cleaning fluids present any risk of abuse, because their intoxicating effects are so totally unconnected to their intended uses. Yet, young children and adolescents are among those most likely to abuse them, and do seek them out for this purpose. Chronic use can lead to brain or nerve damage, damage to the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys. Inhalants can cause death, even the very first time they are used.
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs misused by teens today include pain killers and cold medicines with dextromethorphan (DXM). Misusing these medications can cause respiratory distress, cardiac stress, seizures, dependence and serious withdrawal symptoms. Misuse of DXM can cause nausea, vomiting, seizures, hallucinations and even death.



- Anabolic (muscle-building) steroid abuse is associated with increased risk for heart attacks, strokes and severe liver problems. People who inject anabolic steroids put themselves at risk for contracting dangerous infections, such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C and bacterial endocarditis. Anabolic steroids can also cause undesirable body changes. Men may develop enlarged breasts, and women's bodies may become masculinized. Both sexes can develop acne and hair loss.



Steps to Keeping Your Teens Healthy, Safe and Drug-Free

Open Lines of Communication. It's important to let your kids know what to expect from you. It may surprise you to know that your opinion about drugs really matters to them. You're busy and pulled in many directions, but try to find time to be with your teen when he or she asks to talk to you. Don't say, "In just a minute" or "Not right now." Ask questions that encourage conversation. To show you are listening, you can use phrases like:

- "Sounds like you're saying ..."
- "Do you mean that ..."
- "When that happens to me, I feel like ... Is it like that for you too?"

Set Clear Rules About Drug Use. Tell your teen that you do not want him or her using marijuana, other illicit drugs or alcohol. As they move into middle and high school it is more important than ever to tell your teens that you don't want them using drugs. Setting a firm rule of no drug use will help your teen resist peer and other pressures to use drugs.

Create an Environment That Combines Words With Action. Even though your teens are getting older and spending more time without you, stay involved in their lives, and know how they spend their time. Research shows that kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs. As an African American parent, you already know how important it is to monitor your teens. Here are some helpful monitoring tactics that you can use to help keep your teens drug-free:

- Ask, "Who?" "What?" "When?" and "Where?" Before going out, have your teens tell you WHO they are going to be spending time with; WHAT they will be doing; WHEN or what time they will be at their expected destination; and finally, exactly WHERE they are going to be.
- Once in a while, make a surprise visit to the place your teen has told you he or she is going and ensure that he or she is there. If your teen is visiting a friend, stop by or call the friend's house. Let your teen know you are taking these steps.
- When your teen is away from home, insist that he or she call you to check in, or get a number where he or she can be reached.
- Check in with other parents who are hosting the party your teen is planning to go to.
- Studies show that when teens get into trouble, it is usually between 3 and 6 p.m. Insist that your child check in with you every day after school.
- Get your teens involved in after-school programs and activities supervised by responsible adults. For example, sign your teen up for a sports team, arts group or club. Check with local faith-based organizations to see if they have after-school youth activities, or have your teen volunteer at local organizations where adults are present (e.g., retirement home, children's hospital, animal shelter).

