

Prevention Focus

Setting Priorities During the Holidays...Keeping Your Children Safe

The holidays are just around the corner with the flurry of activity that usually occurs this time of year. Shopping, planning and attending holiday parties, religious celebrations, etc., may involve parents being away from home more than usual. Research shows that unmonitored teens are four times more likely to use marijuana or engage in other risky behaviors, such as underage drinking, sexual activity, and cigarette smoking. Being aware of this increased risk can help parents prioritize their time during the holiday season and prepare to keep kids safe.

Youth of all ages can enjoy being a part of holiday preparations. Making and wrapping gifts, cleaning, decorating, accompanying you on shopping expeditions, cooking/baking and serving others are all ways families can spend quality time together. Why not consider using these times together to discuss what's important in your child's life, the pressures they are experiencing, and their plans for the holidays, etc.? Children who are more connected to their parents are less likely to use alcohol or other drugs.

Below is a list of suggestions on how to interact with your child, not only during the holidays, but all year round.

Parents may be tempted to be less vigilant during the holidays, but avoid mixed messages. Let youth know that alcohol use is illegal and unacceptable for anyone under the age of 21 – **Period**. Teens are more likely to drink and binge drink away from their parents if they have been provided alcohol before by their parents.

Discuss – “what would you do if ...” offered alcohol or other drugs. Knowing ahead of time how to respond can give your child confidence when suddenly faced with difficult choices.

Be a great listener and refrain from making comments until your child has had a chance to express how they feel. Avoid preaching or lecturing. If you disagree with them, try asking additional questions about why they believe what they do. Use teachable moments such as an item in the news/media about substance abuse, impaired driving, etc.

Your child is watching. They form opinions/values based not only on what you say but on what they observe. If you host a party, be responsible. Offer non-alcoholic beverages and don't let adult friends drive impaired. Some of the most dangerous days of the year on our nation's roadways are between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

If your child finds themselves in an uncomfortable situation, they have to know you have their back and they can call you anytime for a ride home. You can talk about the situation later. The priority is the safety of your child.

Resources:

www.madd.org/underage-drinking/the-power-of-parents

www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov

www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/health/healthservices/substanceabuse/non_alcoholic_beverages.html