

**BALTIMORE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
OFFICE OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH 410-887-3828****Parents – Preventing Substance Abuse is No Minor Thing: Take Action!**

The start of another year of school brings excitement for both parents and youth, however, research shows that every year a student progresses in school, is another year that he or she is closer to being introduced to alcohol or drugs and their associated risks. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, by senior year in high school, almost 70% of students will have tried alcohol and 50% will have taken an illegal drug. Although adolescents are “biologically wired” to seek new experiences and try new things, they are also at risk when it comes to consuming alcohol or ingesting drugs. Studies cited by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. indicate that **young people who start drinking alcohol before age 15 are 5 times more likely to develop alcohol abuse or dependence than people who first used alcohol at age 21 or older.** Research for drug use and drug addiction have found similar results.

The human brain doesn't finish developing until the age of 25, and according to the National Institute of Mental Health, the last portion to grow is the prefrontal cortex, the area critical to a person's judgement, impulse control and ability to assess risk. As a result, youth who are exposed to alcohol, drugs and tobacco in their teen years are making decisions that neither they nor their brains are adequately prepared to make.

Help your teen make the right decisions. Use these tips to prevent substance use:

- Spend time with your child and know what's happening in his or her life.
- Know your child's friends. Having friends who avoid cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs may be your teen's best protection from substance abuse.
- Maintain open communication that involves non-judgmental conversation (listen more than you talk).
- Keep your teen busy with meaningful activities, such as sports, faith-based programs, or other groups.
- Practice scenarios where your child can say 'no' to using or trying drugs or alcohol.
- Be clear on your limits and expectations regarding your child's nonuse of alcohol and other drugs. If your child thinks that you will allow substance use, he or she is more likely to try drugs or alcohol.
- Expect your child to follow the household rules. Set reasonable consequences for behavior that needs to change, and consistently carry out the consequences.
- Praise your child for even the little things he or she does well.

Laying the groundwork now for alcohol and drug prevention is the best way to start your child or teen out on the “right” course for both the school year and life. For more information, visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration websites:

<http://toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov/families/help/howtofindhelp.aspx>

<http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources>