

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Protecting Your Child Against Drugs

It is no secret that drug abuse is running rampant in Middle America. Over half a million Americans die every year from overdoses, accidents, illness, or other poor choices. I live in southern Ohio, an area that has been overwhelmed with the opiate epidemic. I recently had the opportunity to attend an “Ohio State University Conversation on the Opioid Crisis” where I learned some things that we can all do to prevent the spread of drug abuse in our own communities. Here are a few things you can do to prevent drug use:

- **Have regular discussions with your children about the risks of drugs and alcohol.** These discussions have been shown to (Who knew?) Be consistent, talk about the law, listen to what your children have to say, and control your emotions as you talk with them.
- **Have dinner together as a family – four or more times per week if possible.** [Research](#) shows that teens who eat meals with their family are less likely to try tobacco, marijuana, alcohol, and other drugs. Use mealtime as a chance to find out what your children are up to, who their friends are, what is going on at school, and to encourage improving grades and school work. Make conversation at mealtime positive and encouraging. Turn off the TV, put cell phones away, and take out earbuds so everyone can talk and listen. (As a side benefit, if you prepare some of these meals together you will save money and teach your children to cook.)
- **Encourage children to be involved in extracurricular activities – sports, music, church activities, 4-H, Scouts, clubs, or volunteering.** Not only should you encourage your child to be busy doing positive activities, but know where they are, who they are with, and when they will be home.
- **Decrease opportunities for exposure to addictive substances.** Keep medication where children won't happen upon it. When you finish taking the pain medication you were given after surgery, [dispose of any that is left](#). Discuss this with older family members as well. Literacy about medications and medication safety is key.
- **Set an example for children.** Use prescription drugs properly, don't use illegal drugs, never drink and drive, and if you drink, drink in moderation. If you [used drugs in the past](#), explain the problems that it may have caused for you or other family members. Discuss why you wouldn't choose to do drugs now.
- **Remember you are the parent!** Monitor your child's TV and Internet viewing, games they are playing, music they are listening to or purchasing, maintain a curfew, make sure adults are present when teens are hanging out and check in with them when they get home from school, and keep track of their school work (they give us access to those grades on the Internet for a reason). Recognize children for the positives – did they raise a grade, achieve a PR (personal best) in running or swimming, or finish all their chores without nagging? If they did, let them select the Sunday lunch meal, the movie you are watching together, or a new game to play together.

Parents and grandparents can have a powerful influence on protecting children from drug use and abuse. Take advantage of opportunities to talk about the risks of drugs and alcohol, and set an

example for your own children and their friends. Volunteer to drive your child and their friends/teammates to events, or allow your child to invite a friend for family dinner on the weekend. When you have these opportunities – ask questions and listen, without criticism. (Author: Barlage, L. [2017]. Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educator, Ohio State University Extension, Ross County)

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