

### **What drug or drugs frighten you the most? Why?**

All drugs should frighten us because they all have the potential of being abused. It is easy to make the case that tobacco is the most frightening drug because smoking is the chief cause of preventable death in the United States. Over 400,000 people die each year from smoking-related illnesses even though many realize that smoking is harmful to their health. While Monitoring the Future studies show consistent decreases in teen smoking over the last 20 years, the fact that 1 in 3 children who experiment with cigarettes will become addicted smokers is still a concern.

In terms of adolescents, alcohol frightens us the most because one-time use could result in lethal overdose. More youth in the United States drink alcohol than smoke tobacco or marijuana, making it the most used drug by American young people. Alcohol can also be linked to the top 3 causes of death for 15-24 year-olds: accidents, homicides and suicides. In addition, alcohol is often connected with violence, sexual assault and other high-risk behaviors. Approximately one in ten drinkers experience negative consequences from drinking and continue to drink. The earlier a teen starts drinking, the greater his or her chances of becoming a problem drinker or alcoholic.

Marijuana is the most frequently used illegal drug in the United States. There are several concerns with marijuana use when it comes to young people. The effect of smoking marijuana on the lungs is a major concern. Marijuana smoke has as much tar, carbon monoxide, cyanide and other toxic materials as tobacco smoke. The two most potent cancer-causing agents in tobacco smoke (benzathrene and benzyrene) are present in even higher amounts in marijuana smoke. Because marijuana smokers tend to inhale more deeply, they absorb about five times as much carbon monoxide and tar than tobacco smokers do. Heavy marijuana smokers may eventually acquire the same health problems as tobacco smokers, including bronchitis, emphysema, and bronchial asthma. Research clearly demonstrates that marijuana has the potential to cause problems in daily life or make a person's existing problems worse. Depression and anxiety have been associated with chronic marijuana use. Because marijuana compromises the ability to learn and remember information, the more a person uses, the more he or she is likely to fall behind in accumulating intellectual, job or social skills. Developing healthy coping skills for life is crucial for adolescents. Marijuana use may interfere with this process.

### **What should I do if my child tells me that a friend is using drugs?**

First reassure your teen that she did the right thing by confiding in you. It's difficult for your teen to keep all of these questions and feelings inside. It's important that she talks about them with you or another trusted adult. Acknowledge that your child's coming to you with her concern about a friend is a tremendous expression of trust. Reward this trust by offering all the support you can as your child deals with this difficult and confusing situation. Resist the urge to tell your child not to hang around with this friend.

Present substance abuse as a health issue rather than one of deficient morals, willpower or character. Discuss ways to help the friend as opposed to getting the friend in trouble. It is essential that parents and young people are aware of the warning signs of substance abuse and learn how to intervene appropriately.

It is important to help your teen continue to be a supportive friend while not condoning or excusing her friend's behavior. Get the facts on the real effects and dangers of the substance of abuse for your child. If your teen decides to talk with her friend about the behavior, help your child practice what to say. In the end, the friend must decide whether or not to seek help, but your child's concern might help the friend take that first step.

Walk your child through the steps of an early intervention:

- Express concern in a caring, non-judgmental way.
- Help your child to identify specific incidents and examples that illustrate her friend's substance use. Use "I Statements" such as "I am worried about your use" as opposed to statements that sound judgmental such as "You're ruining your life."
- Use specific examples, such as "I was really upset when you got drunk at Cindy's party and I had to walk all the way home" as opposed to "You have a drinking problem."
- Pick the right time and place. Only talk to a friend when he is sober and clear-headed. Talking to a person who is under the influence is a waste of time.
- Set limits. Help your child to recognize that people can inadvertently enable a friend's alcohol or other drug use by lying, covering up, or making excuses for him. While your child may not be able to change her friend's behavior, she can set limits that protect her from awkward or dangerous situations. ("I'm not going to do your homework for you." "I only want to spend time with you when you are sober.")
- Don't expect miracles. Most people who get help for alcohol or other drug problems do so because family or friends have lovingly intervened. But such interventions do not always work the first time.

Remind your child not to get discouraged if her friend doesn't immediately change his behavior. Such a change may not occur for years. But if and when it does, your child's expression of concern, added to subsequent interventions by other concerned friends, will have made a difference. Encourage your teen not to give up hope even though his friend might be reluctant to seek help.

Make sure that your child has support while dealing with this issue. A caring parent may be enough, but your child may also want to talk to a school counselor or doctor as well. If your teen and her friend were very close, you may want to look into support groups that exist for people who are trying to cope with a friend or family member who uses drugs, such as Alateen or Al-Anon.

### **Where do you think the main pressure on kids to use drugs originates?**

A new study released by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America reveals a troubling new insight into the reasons why teens use drugs. According to the 2007 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study of 6,511 teens (PATS Teens), the number one reason teens give for using drugs is to deal with the pressures and stress of school. In this study 73 percent of teens reported that school stress is the primary reason for drug use, indicating that teens' perceptions of motivating factors for using drugs are dramatically different than past research has indicated.

An accompanying 2007 Partnership study of parents' attitudes about teen drug use, released in June, showed that parents severely underestimate the impact of stress on their teens' decision to use drugs. Only 7 percent of parents believe that teens might use drugs to cope with stress.

"A wide disconnect exists between what teens are thinking and feeling and what parents believe about their teens when it comes to attitudes about drug use," said Steve Pasierb, president and CEO of the Partnership. "This is a pivotal opportunity for parents to understand what motivates today's teens to engage in this type of risky behavior, and to communicate the very real dangers and risks, while offering their kids support and guidance on dealing with pressure in a healthy way."

Teens give a variety of other reasons for using alcohol and other drugs:

#### Emotional Reasons

- To feel more grown up and/or assert independence
- To feel better about themselves and/or increase confidence
- To escape problems and/or reduce anxiety
- To take risks

### Physical Reasons

- To feel relaxed
- To stop pain
- To increase energy and endurance
- To stay up late

### Social Reasons

- To loosen up in awkward social situations
- To be accepted by peers and/or recognized and admired by friends
- To overcome shyness
- To escape loneliness

### Intellectual Reasons

- To reduce boredom
- To satisfy curiosity and/or experiment
- To be more creative
- To improve attention span

## **How much influence do parental attitudes and role modeling have on teenage drinking and other drug use?**

A lot! You may not realize it, but your actions communicate a great deal to your teenagers. Setting a good example is especially important when it comes to substance use. Parental abuse of alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs significantly increases the chance that a teen will also use those substances and develop a substance abuse problem of their own. If you do use alcohol or smoke cigarettes, however, there may be ways to lessen the likelihood that your child will do the same. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- Use alcohol moderately. FCD defines social use of alcohol as drinking without the intention of getting drunk. Think about the role alcohol plays in your social life. For most social drinkers, drinking is secondary to the main activity rather than the main reason for getting together.
- Don't communicate to your child that alcohol is a good way to handle problems. For example, don't come home from work and say, "I had a rotten day. I need a drink." Let your child see that you have other, healthier ways to cope with stress, such as exercising, listening to music or talking things over with your spouse, partner or friend.
- Don't tell your kids stories about drinking in a way that conveys the message that alcohol use is funny or glamorous.
- Never drink and drive or ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking.
- When you entertain other adults, serve alcohol-free beverages and plenty of food. If anyone drinks too much at your party, make arrangements for them to get home safely.
- If you smoke, quit for your own health as well as that of your family's.
- Don't allow your teen to drink or smoke in your home.
- Don't provide alcohol to teenagers in your home. It's not safe, it sends your teen the wrong message and you are most likely breaking the law.
- Don't involve your teen in your use, such as asking him or her to get you a beer or a cigarette.

## **Is marijuana a dangerous drug for children to experiment with?**

In 2007, the number of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who had ever tried marijuana was 42%. Although this is a decrease from the 60% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who tried it in 1979 when the baby boom generation was coming of age, there is still reason to be concerned. Marijuana is an especially insidious drug for adolescents because they don't recognize its risks. Its portrayal in the media as a "soft", natural and harmless drug, combined with some state laws (and laws in other countries) allowing for medical use of marijuana or decriminalization, perpetuate mixed messages for kids. It is vital that parents help children understand the realities of marijuana.

According to Dr. Joseph Liptik, a psychologist and substance abuse specialist, "There are both psychological and physiological effects of chronic marijuana use. These include deteriorating

psychomotor performance, diminished attention span, and diminished memory capacity. These factors promote learning difficulties and can reduce a student's ability to incorporate and process information, impairing his or her ability to work effectively in school and learn from experience. Chronic users can also experience reduced physical strength, amotivational syndrome, lethargy and depression. Chronic users are sedating their central nervous system, and therefore not feeling their feelings. The most profound impact is that chronic marijuana use interferes with the normal psychological development of adolescents."

The use of marijuana can produce adverse physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral changes, and—contrary to popular belief—it can be addictive. Marijuana smoke, like cigarette smoke, can harm the lungs. The use of marijuana can impair short-term memory, verbal skills, and judgment and distort perception. It also may weaken the immune system and possibly increase a user's likelihood of developing cancer. We know that it impairs lung functioning, poses a cancer risk, suppresses hormones that regulate reproductive systems, hinders concentration, increases the chances of accidents while driving, decreases mental flexibility and inhibits the formation of new memories.

### **When or under what circumstances is teen alcohol use permissible?**

This is a very personal decision. In many families, alcohol is used as a part of religious traditions or family celebrations. Parents need to make their own thoughtful decisions about whether or not their children are allowed to drink alcohol within the home. Parents should bear in mind that there is a great difference between a supervised glass of wine on a special occasion and unmonitored access to champagne at a wedding party. Parents should be aware of the many mixed messages teens receive from the media, peers and their own families about alcohol use.

To date, there is no evidence that suggests that teenagers who drink alcohol at an early age increase the chances that they will be "responsible" drinkers later. In fact, research states that the younger people are when they start using alcohol or other drugs, the higher the chances they will have negative consequences that may include addiction. For that reason, FCD encourages adolescents to delay use of alcohol for as long as possible.

The perception that kids who do not drink in high school will get to college and get into trouble with alcohol because they have never drank is also questionable. Research consistently shows that no single factor determines whether a college student will misuse alcohol. However, for some students, alcohol use in high school has already set the stage for college drinking, with an enabling environment on campus supporting pre-college drinking behavior. Several studies have shown that high school drinking patterns are highly predictive of college drinking patterns. Also, frequency of high-risk drinking in high school often predicted the frequency of high-risk drinking in college.

The claim that all Europeans learn to drink moderately and safely in a family setting is also questionable. Studies show\* that when compared to the U.S., the rate of binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row) was higher in every country except Turkey. In America, 22% of surveyed teens binge drank in the past 30 days. In Denmark, it was 60%, in Germany 57%, in Britain 54% and in Italy, 34% of teens were binge drinking every month.

Despite anecdotal reports of adults teaching youth to drink in moderation, survey data provide no evidence that European youth are more responsible about alcohol consumption than American youth. A recent study\* compared rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems in the United States with those in Europe and found that both rates and frequency of drinking among European youth are higher than in the United States. Additionally, about half of the European countries surveyed had higher rates of intoxication among their youth. Further, according to this study "...a greater percentage of young people from nearly all European countries in the survey report drinking in the past 30 days. For a majority of these European countries, a greater percentage of young people report having five or more drinks in a row. Additionally, per capita consumption of alcohol and cirrhosis death rates are both higher in France and Italy, two countries with a lower legal drinking age. Reports of fewer alcohol-related crashes among European youth are likely due to youth driving "...less frequently in Europe than in the United

States. Compared with the United States, Europeans have higher legal driving ages, more expensive automobiles, and greater access to public transportation. Looking beyond traffic crashes, however, European countries have similar or higher rates of other alcohol-related problems compared with the United States."\*\*

### **How did you (FCD teacher) make your own decisions regarding alcohol or other drugs use when you were a teenager?**

Most of us who drank during our teenage years can't recall making a conscious decision to drink—it just seemed to happen. Those of us who chose not to drink or use other drugs during our teenage years seem to have considered our options much more thoughtfully. We may have had peers or adults in our lives who supported us in that choice, an alcoholic family member whose behavior turned us off to drinking, or interests and activities that filled our lives. FCD encourages parents to re-live their adolescence and think about who or what influenced their use of alcohol, tobacco and/or other drugs at that time. This helps to understand the forces at play in the lives of their own children (e.g. parents, friends, media, etc.).

### **How can parents best help their children remain drug-free during the teen years?**

The common thread among teens who do well academically and socially and stay healthy and drug-free is that they have close relationships with their parents. These teens report that their parents are interested in them, in what they do and in who they know. They also say their parents are curious about their lives and their ideas. They feel connected because their parents listen to them and take the time to find out what's going on in their world. Teens who are close to their parents or a trusted adult caregiver have more at stake when it comes to decisions about risk-taking. At that moment of truth when they are confronted with a risky choice, they don't want to disappoint their parents or betray their trust. They are also more open to their parents' advice. Here are some ways to foster a close relationship with your teen:

- Spend time together regularly doing things your teen enjoys.
- Use positive communication skills, especially when there is conflict. For example, think before you speak and acknowledge your teen's point of view so he or she knows you are listening.
- Acknowledge the positive qualities and behaviors of your teenager.
- Bring up the subject of alcohol and other drugs casually, as opposed to sitting your child down for a lecture. Teachable moments arise from current events, public policy debates and portrayal of drinking and other drug use in movies, on TV and in advertisements.
- Recognize the power of peer influence in your child's life.
- Teach your child to value his individuality.

Staying connected is easier said than done sometimes. How can you get through when your teen is resentful or argumentative? Remember that nearly all teens are working toward independence. They can't develop their own identities unless they challenge things you and others have taught them. So they will often argue just for the sake of disagreeing. However, even when they are giving you a hard time, they are probably listening and remembering. So keep your messages brief, but don't stop talking and reaching out. Understand them by observing and respect them by listening. Keep the lines of communication open and model appropriate use (or non-use) of alcohol. Generally, kids who remain drug-free are also busy with activities that have meaning for them and that they enjoy, without being completely over-scheduled.

### **What should I say if my child asks me if I ever used drugs or alcohol at their age?**

This is the question many parents dread—yet it is highly likely to come up in a family discussion of alcohol. Understand that there is almost always a question behind this question: “Mom, Dad, how did you make your decisions around this stuff? I'm trying to navigate through this and I am confused. What did you do?” So be sure to pause and consider asking your child, “Why do you ask?” before you answer.

The reality is that many parents did drink before they were old enough to legally do so. So how can one be honest with a child without sounding like a hypocrite who advises, “Do as I say, not as I did?” This is a judgment call. If you believe that your drinking or drug use history should not be part of the discussion, you can simply tell your child that you choose not to share it. Another approach is to admit that you did do some drinking as a teenager, but that it was a mistake—and give your teen an example of an embarrassing

or painful moment that occurred because of your drinking. This approach may help your child better understand that youthful alcohol use does have negative consequences.

You can give short, honest answers, such as “Everybody makes mistakes. When I used drugs, I made a big one. I’m telling you this even though it’s embarrassing because I love you and I want to save you from making the same stupid decision I made when I was your age” or “When I was a kid, I took drugs because some of my friends did. I thought I needed to in order to fit in. We didn’t know as much as we do now about all the things that can happen when you smoke marijuana or use other drugs—especially when you are a teenager. If I’d known the consequences, I never would have tried drugs, and I’ll do everything I can to help you stay away from them.”

But what if you had no negative consequences? Most of us know someone who has had negative consequences from drinking or using drugs—often in our own family systems. Perhaps you can share appropriate stories about people whose use of alcohol and other drugs did not turn out so well.

What if you did not use as a teen? If you chose not to use alcohol and/or other drugs when you were a teenager, share the specifics of why you made that choice. Were there challenges for you when you chose not to drink in high school? Try to speak as positively as possible about the choice not to use drugs or drink. Remember not to refer to yourself as a “goody two shoes” or a “loser” who had no social life. Many teenagers see and hear those negative images of non-use in our culture. Challenge those stereotypes. Non-use is a perfectly acceptable lifestyle choice that should be accepted and encouraged!

We don’t recommend that parents glamorize use from the “good old days” or imply that because they turned out okay, their kids will also be okay if they experiment. This simply isn’t always true. Assuming that all kids who drink will grow out of the “phase” of drinking at some point with no consequences is the same as assuming all kids who drink will become alcoholics. Neither statement is correct. The reality is that all use equals risk.

Remember your child is repeatedly faced with the decision of whether or not to use alcohol or other drugs; it’s not a one-time decision for many kids. Your job is to help them build a solid foundation and values.

### **If my child takes prescription medication for ADD or ADHD, does that increase the risk of addiction?**

Numerous studies have shown an inverse relationship between drug therapy for ADHD and drug abuse. Perhaps the most compelling was conducted recently by a research team at Harvard University. They analyzed data from six studies and found that people with ADD who received appropriate treatment in childhood (almost always with stimulants) were a remarkable 50 percent *less likely* than their untreated peers to abuse drugs or alcohol in adolescence or young adulthood. Those with *untreated/undiagnosed* ADD, however, were more likely to self-medicate with non-prescribed substances.

The sooner we treat children, adolescents, and adults with ADHD the more likely we are to help them to minimize or eliminate self-medicating. Many well-meaning parents, therapists and medical doctors are fearful that treating ADHD with medication will lead to addiction. Not all people with ADHD need to take medication. For those who do, however, prescribed medication that is closely monitored can actually prevent and minimize the need to self-medicate. When medication helps people to concentrate, control their impulses and regulate their energy level, they are less likely to self-medicate.

The bottom line is that people with ADHD as a whole are more likely to self-medicate themselves with substances than those who do not have ADHD. Dr. Ned Hallowell, an expert in the field of ADD, estimates that 8 to 15 million Americans suffer from ADD; other researchers estimate that as many as 30-50% of them use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate their ADHD symptoms. Thus, it is vital to get a proper evaluation and diagnosis for your child if you suspect ADD is a factor.

## **I hear prescription drug abuse among teens is on the rise. What can I do about that?**

While recent Monitoring the Future research shows that prescription drug abuse (in particular prescription pain relievers) among teens is increasing, it is important to be aware that the vast majority of teens are not abusing prescription drugs. However, it is a serious concern and there is a lot parents can do. First, think about your own home. What prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs do you have? Where are they kept? Would you know if some were missing? The good news is that you can take steps immediately to limit access to these drugs and help keep your teen drug-free. Set clear rules for teens about all drug use, including not sharing medicine and always following the medical provider's advice and dosages. Make sure your teen uses prescription drugs only as directed by a medical provider and follows instructions for OTC products carefully. This includes taking the proper dosage and not using with other substances without a medical provider's approval. Prescription drugs should always be used as directed and only by the person for whom they are prescribed. Teens should never mix prescription drugs or OTC drugs with alcohol or other illegal drugs. Be a good role model by following these same rules with your own medicines. Examine your own behavior to ensure you set a good example.

In addition, consider the following suggestions:

- Safeguard all drugs at home.
- Monitor quantities and control access.
- Take note of how many pills are in a bottle or pill packet, and keep track of refills. This goes for your own medication, as well as for your teen and other members of your household.
- If you find you have to refill medication more often than expected, someone may be taking your medication without your knowledge.
- Properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medicines in the trash. Unused prescription drugs should be hidden and thrown away in the trash. So that teens or others don't take them out of the trash, you can mix them with an undesirable substance (such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter) and put the mixture in an empty can or bag.
- Remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away. Ask friends and family to safeguard their prescription drugs as well.
- Make sure your friends and relatives, especially grandparents, also know about the risks, and encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets. If there are other households your teen has access to, talk to those families as well about the importance of safeguarding medications. If you don't know the parents of your child's friends, then make an effort to get to know them, and get on the same page about rules and expectations for use of all drugs, including alcohol and illicit drugs.
- Talk to your teen about the dangers of abusing prescription and over-the-counter drugs. These are powerful drugs that, when abused, can be just as dangerous as street drugs. Tell your teen the risks far outweigh any "benefits."

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