

# Does Prevention Work?

Adapted from Doc Pop's 52 Weeks of Active Parenting by Michael H. Popkin, Ph.D.

Some kids seem to be born with the idea that it is easier to get forgiveness than permission. That philosophy can get them into a lot of trouble especially when it comes to smoking, drugs and alcohol. That's why parents need to be very clear about their stance on smoking, drugs and alcohol. Often parents will assume that kids know how their parents feel about the subject, but haven't actually talked to their kids about specific behaviors. This approach may leave wiggle-room for kids to experiment with drugs and alcohol. For example, parents may have told their kids not to smoke, only to find out they were using chewing tobacco. Parents are dumbstruck when their kids say *"Oh, I didn't know you meant that I couldn't chew tobacco; I just thought you meant I couldn't smoke cigarettes."*

Sometimes this can be a misunderstanding, but more often than not, it's creative thinking on their part. Research shows us that disappointing their parents is the #1 reason some kids choose not to use drugs. That's powerful and valuable information *if* your kids know that you would be disappointed!

Having a family meeting to discuss your no-use policy about drugs and alcohol will make it perfectly clear how you feel about the subject. And it is an opportunity to find out how your kids feel about the subject too. Instead of making the meeting a speech worthy of a dictator, opt for a bit of "give and take" in negotiating clear standards and policies about what is and is not acceptable in a given situation.

Of course, parents as leaders in the family, have the right and responsibility to limit behaviors that are unhealthy, unsafe, illegal, immoral, or violate family values. Still, that leaves a lot to discuss. The result is that everyone knows what's expected beforehand and kids feel empowered since they were part of the process.

Drugs and alcohol use are not the only topics worthy of a Prevention Talk. There are many situations that could be improved upon with a little "up-front" discussion on expected behavior: going out to eat in a restaurant, going to the store, visiting grandparents, spending the night at a friend's house, etc.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# How to Hold a Prevention Talk

Before your meet with your kids, take a few minutes to write down your concerns and identity potential problems. Once you are comfortable with the topic, then call the family together and start with something like “just to make sure we are all on the same page about \_\_\_\_\_.” Keep your tone and attitude positive. You want to show confidence in your children’s ability to make good decisions and behave appropriately for the situation. Some of the questions you might ask are:

*“What kind of problems might come up that you would have to deal with?”*

*“How would you handle that?”*

*“What if ...?”*

Be sure to get agreements and stay encouraging. For example:

*“Then, we agree that ...”*

*“And if \_\_\_\_\_ happens, then you will \_\_\_\_\_ and I will \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“Good thinking!” “I like that.” “I want to make sure you have a good time, and that you stay safe and healthy.”*

Takes notes from your meeting and afterward write down the agreements and expectations. Some families like to post final agreements in a prominent location as reminder to all.

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_