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# **KEEPING KIDS SAFE**

A Guide to Drug and  
Alcohol Prevention

# What is Red Ribbon Week?

Set for October 23-31 this year, Red Ribbon Week is an annual event aimed at raising awareness about the destruction that can be wreaked on lives and communities by drug use.

The National Family Partnership organized the first Nationwide Red Ribbon Campaign, and since its beginning in 1985, the “Red Ribbon” has touched the lives of millions of people around the world.

## HOW IT STARTED

The movement began in response to the murder of DEA Agent Enrique Camarena in 1985, while he was on assignment in Mexico. Emboldened by the tragic event, parents and children in communities across the country began wearing red ribbons as a symbol of their commitment to raise awareness of the killing and destruction caused by drugs in America.

According to the National Family Partnership, friends and neighbors began wearing red badges of satin in honor of Camarena’s memory and his battle against illegal drugs.

Parents, tired of the destruction of alcohol and other drugs, had begun forming coalitions. Some of these new coalitions took Camarena as their model and embraced his belief that one person can make a difference.

## THE RIBBON

These coalitions also adopted the symbol of Camarena’s memory, the red ribbon.

“The Red Ribbon Campaign is a fun, powerful and effective way to deliver focused, branded, healthy, anti-drug messages to the public,” says NFP President Peggy Sapp. “The winners of the National Red Ribbon Awards honor DEA Agent Kiki Camarena’s legacy by helping to create a drug free America through the promotion, support and growth of the National Red Ribbon Campaign.”

## THE PLEDGE

Learn and take the official Red Ribbon Pledge below:

- As parents and citizens, we will talk to our children and the children in our lives about the dangers of drug abuse.
- We will set clear rules for our children about not using drugs.
- We will set a good example for our children by not using illegal drugs or medicine without a prescription.
- We will monitor our children’s behavior and enforce appropriate consequences, so that our rules are respected.
- We will encourage family and friends to follow the same guidelines to keep children safe from substance abuse.



# Talk to kids about drugs

**T**he most obvious way to deter drug use among youths is to speak with them openly and honestly about the inherent dangers.

Statistics show children of parents who talk to their teens regularly about drugs are 42 percent less likely to use drugs than those who don't. But, according to the National Family Partnership, just one-fourth of teens report actually having those conversations.

## RISKS

Using alcohol and drugs before the brain has fully developed increases the risk for future addiction to alcohol and drugs dramatically, according to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD). Youths who start drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol abuse or dependence problems in the future, when compared to people who first use alcohol at the legal age.

"Talking to our children about drug use is not always easy, but it is crucial," said National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Nora D. Volkow, M.D. "You can also get involved in your community and seek out drug abuse prevention programs that you and your child can participate in together. Sometimes, just beginning the conversation is the hardest part."

## RISK FACTORS

Underage drug use can cause a variety of problems, such as impaired driving skills due to impaired reaction and judgment time; serious health

problems, including liver damage or heart failure from drugs such as ecstasy and lung and kidney damage from inhalants; and psychotic behavior from chronic use of methamphetamine. Teens who use drugs also are more likely to develop drug dependence in the future.

Common risk factors for teen drug abuse include a family history of substance abuse; mental or behavioral health conditions such as depression, anxiety and ADHD; impulsive behavior; a history of traumatic events; low self-esteem; poor social skills; academic failure; and peer or parental influences who encourage drug use.

## ALCOHOL-RELATED ACCIDENTS

According to data gathered by D.A.R.E., junior and high school students drink 35 percent of the wine coolers consumed in the U.S., while binge drinking is reported as early as the eighth grade.

Alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of death among people 15 to 24 years of age, while half of all youthful deaths in drowning, fires, suicide and homicide are alcohol related. A U.S. Department of Health and Human Services survey of high school seniors found 2.5 million respondents did not know they could die of alcohol poisoning.



# Recognize gateway drugs

**M**ost drug users don't start out using hard drugs such as heroin. Instead, they typically begin with a "gateway" drug. For teens, a handful of drugs can lead to a lifetime of drug abuse.

Of course there is no guarantee a young person using a gateway drug will move on to more dangerous substances such as methamphetamine, cocaine, or heroin. Research suggests that in the majority of cases they will not. But for hard drug users, the journey often did begin with gateway drugs.

## COMMON GATEWAY DRUGS

The most common gateway drugs used by teens include tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. The reason? These items are almost always the most easily accessible for teens looking to experiment. These substances also can prove extremely addictive to a child's underdeveloped central nervous system.

### TOBACCO

According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education, "Tobacco use is associated with alcohol and illicit drug use and is generally the first drug used by young people who enter a sequence of drug use that can include tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and harder drugs."

According to statistics from the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), the younger a child starts smoking, the more addicted they become later in



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life. A U.S. Department of Education report notes children who "begin to smoke at an early age are more likely to develop severe levels of nicotine addiction" than those who start at a later age.

### MARIJUANA

The National Institute on

Drug Abuse (NIDA) has found cannabinoids could decrease the reactivity of brain dopamine reward centers later in adulthood. A NIDA report notes this could explain early marijuana initiates' increased vulnerability for drug abuse and addiction to other substances of abuse later in life

that has been reported by most epidemiological studies.

### ALCOHOL

By the time a teen graduates high school, research shows there is a 90 percent chance they have already experimented with alcohol. Though alcohol can some-

times be abused, like anything, drinking as an adult can be done responsibly. But, teens are more likely to abuse alcohol through social pressures and a lack of experience — and at such a young age — it can become a coping mechanism to deal with stress or anxiety.

# What to discuss with teens

**I**t might not be easy, but there are some key points to follow that can help open a dialog between a parent and teen when it comes to the dangers of drug use.

## HOW TO START

First, make a point to ask the teen to share their own views. It provides a foundation for moving forward and allows the parent to see what the teen may or may not know. It's best to avoid long, boring lectures. Instead, the Mayo Clinic recommends listening to the teen's opinions and answering their questions about drug use. Though they may not answer, observe the teen's nonverbal responses to see how he or she feels about the topic. To keep the discussion open, try to make statements instead of asking questions. For example: "I'm curious about your point of view" might work better than "What do you think?"

## MAKE THE CASE

Discuss the reasons not to abuse drugs, but avoid scare tactics. Make an effort to connect the consequences of drug use to things important to the child. Focus on how it can affect things such as sports, driving, health and appearance. Make it clear that even a teen can develop a drug problem, and it's not just harmless fun.

Address the media messages about drugs head-on. Songs, television programs, movies and websites often glamorize or trivialize drug use. Ask the



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teen about what they have seen or heard in the media they consume.

Music and films can create an inaccurate perception about the consequences of drugs, so make an effort to clarify any existing misconceptions.

## HOW TO RESIST

Discuss ways to resist peer pressure, if it does arise. Brainstorm with the teen about how to turn down offers of drugs in social situations. Role-playing through these scenarios before they happen can help give a teen the confi-

dence and experience needed to say no in the future.

Though the point is to help the teen, the questions can often circle back to the parent. Be ready to discuss your own drug use, if applicable. Be prepared if the teen asks about your own experiences with

drug use. If you abstained, explain why. If you did use drugs, share what the experience taught you and hope they can learn from the example.

*Discussion guideline provided by the Mayo Clinic.*

# Tips to keep teens off drugs

**T**hough parents can't be everywhere, there are some steps they can take to help keep their children off drugs.

## IT'S OKAY TO BE THE 'BAD' PARENT

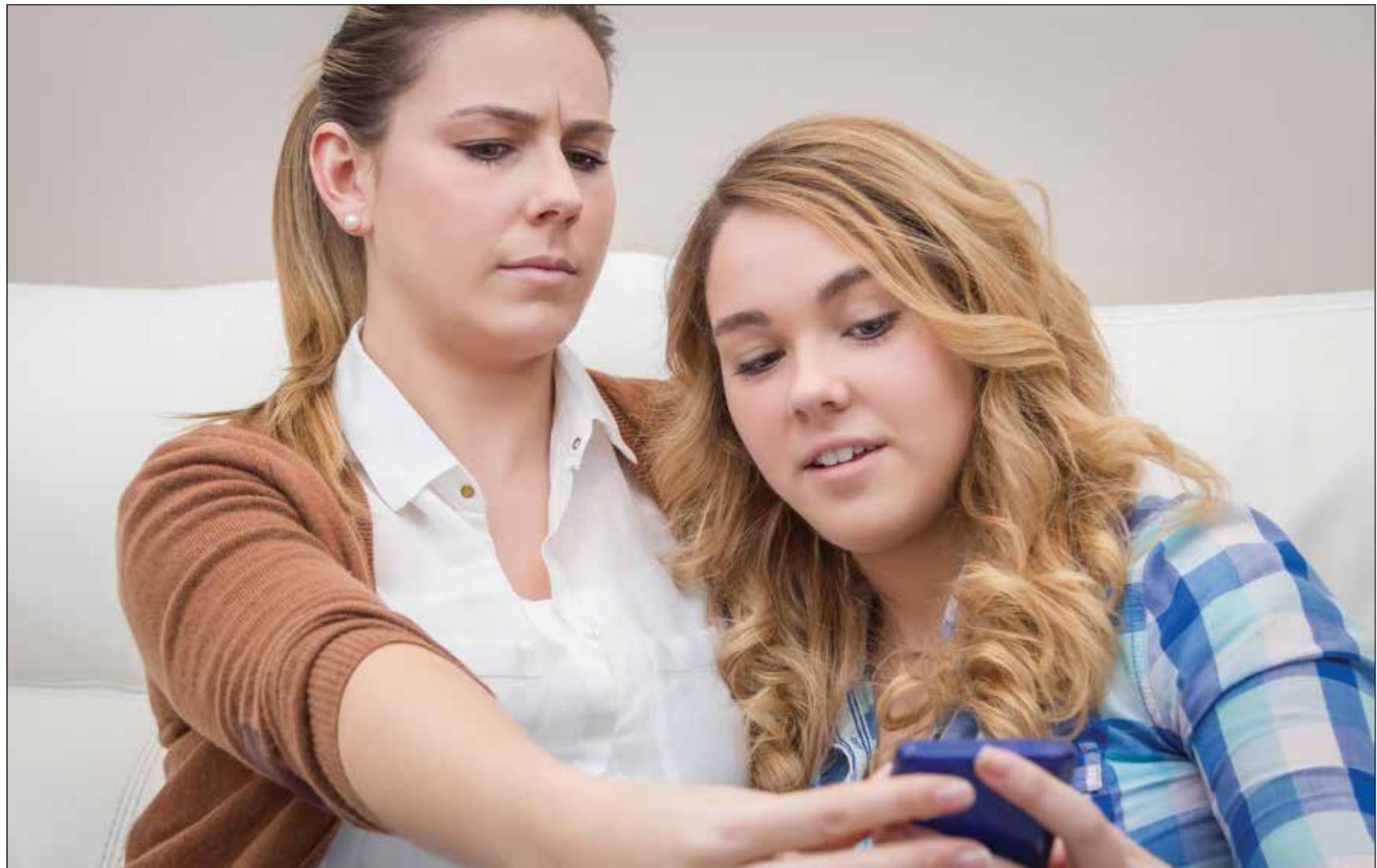
Don't let a fear of receiving a negative reaction from a child be a deterrent to talking to them about drugs. Take a strong stance on drug use and don't back down. Though this will obviously set a clear precedent for what is expected, it also can give children a natural excuse to abstain if pressured. If they know there are serious consequences at home, a teen might think twice.

## ESTABLISH FAMILY RULES

Set some guidelines in stone for children, so they know specifically what is expected. Some basic examples include no one under 21 years old can drink alcohol; teens are not allowed to ride with anyone who has been drinking; no parties without parental supervision; and no attending parties where alcohol or drugs are present.

## KNOW YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDS

Make an effort to connect with the friends children are spending time with. Make your home a safe gathering place



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for your child and their friends. Invite your children's friends over for dinner, and encourage your child to invite friends over. If they are spending time in a place with supervision and rules, there are fewer opportunities for alcohol or drug use.

## GET TO KNOW OTHER PARENTS

Though getting to know the kids who are influencing your child is obviously important, it's also critical to know more about their parents and potential home life. Making connections with the families of your child's friends can open

the door for a joint effort to encourage the entire social circle to avoid alcohol and drug use.

## FOLLOW THE RULES

Being a good role model, and setting a good example, is one of the most obvious and easiest ways to discourage drug use. Research studies show that parents who drink alcohol or use drugs are more likely to have kids who drink or use. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation; if you use medication, use only as directed, and do not use illegal drugs. If you host a party, always serve alternative non-alcoholic beverages and

do not let anyone drink and drive.

## PROMOTE HEALTHY, SAFE ACTIVITIES

If there do not seem to be many options for your child and their friends, help create some. Backyard sports, hikes, exercise and outdoor activities are a safe and healthy way for teens to spend time. Also encourage teens to engage in school and community activities such as music, sports, arts or a part-time job.

Tips provided by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

# Prescription drugs

**I**llegal drugs might seem like the most obvious threat, but prescription medications are often more easily accessible for teens looking to experiment with drugs.

According to the National Family Partnership, approximately 3,300 children per day begin experimenting with prescription drugs. Of that total, 70 percent who abuse pain medication claim to have gotten it from friends or family. To make it harder for teens to obtain prescription drugs, it's recommended that all prescription drugs be locked in a safe place where access is tightly controlled.

## KEEP TRACK

Though locking access to prescription drugs is an excellent first step, no lock is impenetrable. So, anyone with prescription drugs also should keep a running inventory of their medications and how many pills should be in each bottle. Keep a regular check on the medication cabinet to make sure nothing is missing.

Be aware of which drugs are typically used by teens, with the leading options being pain relievers, sedatives, stimulants and tranquilizers. Talk to children about the dangers of drug abuse, and make it clear medications are being monitored. Also, express disapproval of using prescription drugs without a prescription. Knowing access is being watched makes for an excellent deterrent.



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## DISPOSE OF OUTDATED MEDS

When in possession of any outdated medication, be sure to dispose of it safely and properly.

Kids Health notes prescription drug abuse among teens continues to increase. In 2012, 24 percent of teens surveyed

said they have taken a prescription drug without a doctor's prescription. Per the report, teens sometimes mistakenly believe prescription drugs are possibly safer, or less addictive than "street" drugs. Remind youths that prescription drugs are only safe for those who have been

prescribed the medication. Remind teens that taking drugs they are not prescribed can have varied, and sometimes dangerous, consequences to their health.

## THE STATISTICS

Behind marijuana and alcohol, prescription drugs

are the most commonly abused substances by Americans age 14 and older, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Teens abuse prescription drugs for many reasons: to get high or stop pain, or because they think it will help them focus on school work.

# Warning signs

**W**ith emotions often running high over friends or school, teenagers are typically prone to emotional swings — regardless of potential drug or alcohol influences.

But, there are some warning signs to look out for if you fear a child might be using illegal substances.

There are several physical signs that might indicate a teen is using drugs or alcohol. They include changes in sleep patterns, bloodshot eyes, slurred speech, skin abrasions, unexplained injuries and dramatic weight loss or gain.

## LESS OBVIOUS SIGNS

Less obvious signs might include secretive actions or lying to hide where they have been, loss of interest in other activities (such as sports, hobbies and friends), emotional instability, depression, aggression and a sudden lack of respect or interest in school or work assignments.

Other signs include avoiding eye contact, a sudden change in peer groups, unusual smells, or even increased use of over-the-counter treatments to help with bad breath, red eyes or nasal irritation.

## HYGIENE

Children or teens who start using drugs might show a sudden lack of interest in their physical appearance, manifested by an unkempt look, flushed cheeks, poor hygiene, track marks on arms or legs (which can lead some to wear long



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sleeve shirts out of season in an effort to conceal them), and burn or soot marks on fingers and lips.

## KEEP TABS ON ALCOHOL

If alcohol is kept in the house for adult use, parents should make a point to ensure no bottles go missing, as that would

be another warning sign that something is wrong.

Of course, when looking for these signs, be prepared for what you will do next if any are present. Here's what the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids recommends:

"If you've noticed any of the changes related to substance

abuse listed below, don't be afraid to come right out and ask your teen direct questions like 'Have you been offered drugs?' If yes, 'What did you do?' or 'Have you been drinking or using drugs?' While no parent wants to hear a 'yes' response to these questions, be prepared for it. Decide, in

advance how you'll respond to a 'yes'. Make sure you reassure your child that you're looking out for him or her, and that you only want the best for his or her future."

*Warning signs provided by D.A.R.E., Partnership for Drug-Free Kids.*