

Keeping Kids Safe

A GUIDE TO DRUG AND ALCOHOL PREVENTION



Be Kind To Your Mind

As autumn's crisp air fills the atmosphere, there's a powerful message echoing across America: "Be Kind to Your Mind: Live Drug Free."

This year's theme for Red Ribbon Week, celebrated from Oct. 23-31, serves as a vibrant reminder of the profound effect that individuals can have on their communities by choosing a drug-free path.

CALL TO ACTION

The origins of Red Ribbon Week can be traced back to a tragic event in 1985. Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, a dedicated Drug Enforcement Administration agent was tortured and killed while fighting against drug trafficking. In response to his death, the National Family Partnership rallied to honor his memory and created Red Ribbon Week, the nation's largest and longest-running drug-use prevention campaign.

The week, now a national observance, serves as a vital platform for communities to promote and support a drug-free lifestyle.

It's a time when individuals, schools and organizations unite to promote awareness, prevention and education about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

By choosing to live drug-free, ordinary Americans con-



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tribute to the betterment of their neighborhoods and the health of future generations. It was a key belief of Camarena — that one person could make a difference.

'BE KIND TO YOUR MIND'

This year's theme places a spotlight on the importance of

mental health and well-being in the fight against substance abuse.

Every year, the National Family Partnership hosts a contest to choose the theme with the winner taking home Red Ribbon merchandise. This year's deadline to submit a theme is Dec. 4.

and hinders further growth. Drugs decrease levels of neurotransmitters in the reward system of our brain, such as dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins. This can block our brain from naturally experiencing happiness."

The theme, Helm said, encourages people to make positive choices so that they can be happy and healthy.

DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

The DEA also contributes materials and resources such as videos, posters, flyers, sample news releases and downloadable graphics. They have four websites that support anti-drug efforts including:

- www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com has drug prevention resources for parents, caregivers and educators.
- www.justthinktwice.com has drug prevention and education resources for teens.
- www.campusdrugprevention.gov is a resource to prevent drug abuse among college students.
- www.operationprevention.com provides science-based digital lessons to educate students about opioid misuse.

They recommend using the week to engage in such actions as sponsoring an anti-drug poster and essay contest, creating an anti-drug PSA, hosting a community drug awareness event, decorating or lighting up buildings and national monuments in red, or taking the pledge to live a drug-free life.

The 2023 theme was submitted by Danielle Helm, a youth service coordinator from Russell County Middle School in Russell Springs, Kentucky.

She told the Red Ribbon organizers, "I chose this theme because drugs alter our current brain development

Resisting Substance Abuse

Parents can teach kids the skills they need to develop resilience.

In the challenging landscape of today's world, where the allure of drugs or alcohol can be a daunting threat, nurturing resilience, coping skills and a robust sense of self in children is paramount. These crucial qualities serve as armor, equipping young minds to navigate life's twists and turns while resisting the siren call of substance abuse.

By fostering these attributes, parents and caregivers play a pivotal role in ensuring their children's safety and wellbeing.

A LIFELONG SKILL

Resilience, often referred to as the ability to bounce back from adversity, is a skill that serves kids well beyond their formative years. It's a quality that helps them face challenges head-on, recover from setbacks, and ultimately grow stronger. Encouraging resilience involves teaching children to view obstacles as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers.

CULTIVATING COPING SKILLS

Life is filled with stressors, big and small, so arming kids with effective coping mechanisms is crucial. Whether it's academic pressures, peer conflicts or family issues, knowing how to handle stress in



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healthy ways significantly reduces the likelihood of turning to substances for relief.

One powerful tool is teaching kids how to identify and express their emotions. Encourage them to talk about what they're feeling and assure them it's OK to seek help when needed. Introduce stress-relief techniques like deep breathing, physical activity or engaging in creative outlets. These skills not only alleviate stress but also instill a sense of control over their

emotions and reactions.

SENSE OF SELF

A solid foundation of self-esteem is like a shield against the temptations of substance abuse. Children with a healthy self-image are more likely to make decisions that align with their well-being and future goals. Encourage them to appreciate their unique qualities and talents. Acknowledge their achievements, no matter how small, and emphasize the value of self-respect.

OPEN COMMUNICATION

Perhaps the most vital aspect of building resilience, coping skills and self-esteem is open communication. Maintain an environment where kids feel comfortable discussing their thoughts, fears and questions. Actively listen without judgment, and provide guidance while allowing them to make choices and learn from them. This fosters independence and a sense of responsibility, key components of a strong character.

A LASTING GIFT

Putting a high priority on the development of resilience, coping skills and self-esteem helps parents and caregivers equip their children with a priceless gift — a shield against the allure of substance abuse.

These qualities not only serve them during their vulnerable teenage years but also set the stage for a future filled with confident decision-making and a resilient spirit in the face of life's challenges.

Education vs. Punishment

Opting for educational approaches instead of punitive measures can make a profound difference in the lives of young people.

By emphasizing understanding, support and the use of restorative justice techniques, we can create an environment where learning and growth take precedence over punishment, fostering healthier choices and outcomes.

The International Institute for Restorative Practices draws on research that has shown that doing things with people rather than to or for them creates better outcomes, especially when it comes to leading young people to make better choices.

PATH TO EMPOWERMENT

Rather than immediately resorting to punitive actions, taking an educational approach enables us to connect with young people on a more meaningful level. It's an opportunity to engage in open conversations, fostering understanding about the risks and consequences of substance use without shutting down communication.

By treating early signs of substance use as a teachable moment, we empower youth to make informed decisions about their well-being.

This is especially important



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when it comes to issues of racial justice. The National Institutes of Health report that there is abundant data showing that Black people and communities of color have been disproportionately harmed by treating drug use as a crime rather than as a public health issue. This has happened despite the fact that the medical community has known for decades that addiction is a treatable medical

condition, a brain disorder, and not a character flaw or a form of social deviance.

COMMUNITY CONFERENCES

The United Nations has released a handbook for dealing with drug use in schools. In it, they recommend community conferencing as a non-punitive approach to responding to students who are involved in drug-related inci-

dents in schools or community settings.

Community conferencing, the handbook says, is “a process that brings together, in the wake of a serious incident, the offender, his or her victim(s) and the victim’s family and appropriate school personnel in order to explore the harm done to all those affected, to decide what needs to be done to repair the harm and how to minimize the chance

of it happening again.”

During the conference, people can tell their stories about what harm was caused and share the feelings that they have about it. It provides room for acknowledgment, validation and apology. The person responsible for the harm is asked to repair the damage, something the handbook points out, can be far more demanding than a suspension, detention or other punishment that does not make the young person accountable for the harm caused.

SCHOOLS

Schools play a crucial role in supporting non-punitive approaches to substance abuse.

Collaborating with educators and administrators to implement educational programs that address substance use with empathy and understanding can have a significant effect.

Promote the creation of safe spaces where students feel comfortable discussing their concerns, questions and struggles without fear of punitive consequences.

It may be necessary to work with school boards or school administrations if there is a zero tolerance approach to discipline that favors punishment over restorative approaches. Be prepared to present data and research showing why non-punitive approaches are more effective in preventing and treating substance abuse.

Making Informed Choices

Kids are surrounded by media at every turn. That makes media literacy skills invaluable.

This skill helps them navigate the sea of information and enables them to critically analyze media messages about drugs and alcohol, empowering them to make informed decisions that can shape their futures in a positive and drug-free manner.

From movies to social media, advertisements to online content, media has a significant influence on young minds. Even the music kids listen to can have messages that aren't always healthy about drug and alcohol use.

Help children recognize that not everything they see or hear is accurate or beneficial. By fostering a sense of curiosity and skepticism, parents and educators can guide kids to question and analyze the messages they encounter.

The Media Education Lab lists media literacy as a method of empowering youth to be positive forces for social change. It helps them to recognize how media messages influence them so that they can protect themselves against messages about drugs or unhealthy lifestyle choices.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Media literacy equips kids with the tools to decipher the intentions behind media mes-



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sages. They learn to identify biases, detect misinformation and understand how these messages can affect their attitudes and behaviors. When it comes to drugs and alcohol, media can often glamorize or normalize substance use, making it crucial for kids to be able to dissect and evaluate these portrayals.

Teaching kids to critically analyze media messages involves encouraging them to ask questions. Suggest that they consider who created the content, what might be the motiva-

tion behind it and whether it's presenting a balanced view. For instance, when they encounter a movie or TV show depicting substance use, ask them to think about how that portrayal aligns with the real-life consequences.

BALANCING REALISM AND IDEALISM

Media literacy is not about demonizing all portrayals of drugs and alcohol. It's about recognizing that media can present a wide spectrum of per-

spectives, some more accurate than others. Encourage kids to seek out reliable sources, educational materials and stories that provide a realistic understanding of potential risks and consequences of substance use.

Ultimately, media literacy empowers kids to make informed decisions. It equips them to resist peer pressure, recognize the consequences of substance use and differentiate between responsible portrayals and those that may promote unhealthy behaviors.

Teaching media literacy is a way to arm the next generation with a skill that transcends the boundaries of adolescence. It's a skill that fosters critical thinking, resilience and the ability to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

Media literacy can be a powerful tool that can guide kids toward healthy choices, enabling them to lead drug-free lives filled with confidence, awareness and the ability to see beyond the surface of media messages.

Drug Addiction Risk Factors

Knowing risk factors is part of the job of steering kids away from the pitfalls of drug and alcohol use.

While some factors increase a child's susceptibility to substance abuse, help is always available and a drug-free life is entirely achievable. Addressing risk factors head-on helps parents and caregivers provide the support and guidance their children need to thrive, no matter the challenges they may face.

FAMILY HISTORY

Family history is the largest risk factor for drug or alcohol abuse. If a child comes from a background with a history of substance abuse, they might be more vulnerable to the allure of drugs and alcohol.

The American Addictions Center reports that people with a family history of alcohol abuse can be as much as four times more likely to have alcohol addiction issues. Likewise, people are eight times more likely to develop a drug addiction if they have a parent with a drug problem.

TRAUMA

Experiencing trauma, whether due to personal circumstances or witnessing it within the family or community, can have a lasting effect on a child's mental and emotional well-being. These traumas might include child



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abuse, criminal acts, disasters, accidents or illness, or family loss. People sometimes turn to alcohol or drugs as a way to cope.

The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies links both traumatic events/substance abuse and trauma-related disorders/substance abuse disorders. People who experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression can experience substance use disorders at the same frequency.

It's crucial to acknowledge

the effects of trauma while also reinforcing that healing is possible. Creating a safe and supportive environment where children can talk about their experiences without judgment can help them build resilience and reduce the likelihood of turning to substances for escape.

PEER PRESSURE

The social environment plays a significant role in a child's life, particularly during adolescence. Peer pressure, the desire to fit in and expo-

sure to friends or acquaintances experimenting with drugs can put children at risk. Empower kids to make positive choices and select friends who share their values and goals. Encouraging extracurricular activities and fostering strong family bonds can counterbalance negative social influences.

MOVING FORWARD

No matter the risk factors, a child's future isn't predetermined. With the right support, education and open commu-

nication, they can overcome these challenges.

Promoting a drug-free life means equipping children with the tools to make informed decisions and encouraging them to lean on positive influences when times get tough. Addressing these risk factors with optimism and a willingness to provide assistance paves the way for children to grow into resilient, confident individuals who can successfully navigate life's challenges and choose to live drug-free.

Narcan Prevents Overdoses

Narcan has emerged as a crucial resource in preventing drug deaths.

In the ongoing effort to keep kids safe and combat the devastating effects of drug addiction, one essential tool that parents should be aware of is Narcan (generic name: naloxone). It can make a significant difference in safeguarding young lives.

KEEPING IT HANDY

Narcan is a medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, potentially saving a person's life. According to the Food and Drug Administration, it does not cause additional harm if given to someone without opioids in their system (for example if someone is instead having a diabetic coma or experiencing a heart attack). Some examples of opioids include heroin, fentanyl, oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine and morphine.

While the primary focus of preventing drug addiction centers on education and communication, having Narcan on hand can act as a critical safety net.

It's particularly relevant in households where there may be individuals at risk of accidental opioid overdose, such as those taking prescription pain medications or living in communities affected by opioid misuse.



UNDERSTANDING NARCAN'S USE

Narcan is available in a few different forms, including nasal spray and injectable formats. It's designed to be easy to use, even for individuals without medical training. If a parent or caregiver suspects someone is experiencing an opioid overdose, administering Narcan can temporarily reduce the effects of the overdose, providing precious time to seek emergency medical assistance.

The FDA said that Narcan works very quickly. A person

experiencing an overdose may wake up within one to three minutes after someone administers Narcan.

Narcan works by binding to the same receptors in the brain that opioids bind to, blocking its effects and rapidly restoring normal breathing. It's a fast-acting tool that can be the difference between life and death in a critical situation.

According to the FDA, a person experiencing an opioid overdose may be unconscious or unresponsive, have shallow breathing, limpness, blue lips

or gums, blue fingertips, or slow or irregular heartbeat or pulse.

NARCAN'S ROLE IN FIGHTING ADDICTION

While Narcan is a crucial emergency response tool, it's essential to remember that it doesn't address the root causes of drug addiction. Its primary role is to prevent overdose fatalities, providing a second chance for individuals struggling with opioid misuse to seek help and treatment.

By keeping Narcan handy,

parents and caregivers play an active role in the community's safety, demonstrating care for those who may be at risk of opioid overdose. However, it's equally important to connect individuals struggling with addiction to professional help support groups and rehabilitation services.

Combining Narcan with comprehensive prevention strategies and access to addiction treatment can have a significant effect on reducing the devastating consequences of drug misuse.

The Reality of Vaping



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Health professionals are increasingly concerned about the rise of vaping among teenagers.

While marketed as a seemingly harmless alternative to traditional cigarettes, vaping can lead to nicotine addiction and pose significant dangers. Yale Medicine reports that young people are vaping in record numbers and those numbers keep climbing. They point out that while there are pod refills or liquids that don't have nicotine, they are harder to find. Studies show, they say, that young people who vape are far more likely to take up cigarette smoking later.

The dangers that nicotine poses are especially keen for people under the age of 25 whose brains have not yet fully developed.

“Adolescents don't think they will

get addicted to nicotine, but when they do want to stop, they find it's very difficult,” says Yale neuroscientist Marina Picciotto, PhD, who studies the basic science behind nicotine addiction. A key reason for this is that “the adolescent brain is more sensitive to rewards.”

When a teen vapes, nicotine is quickly absorbed through the blood vessels in the lungs. It can reach the brain in about 10 seconds, activating the brain's dopamine system, which rewards the body for doing something it perceives as helpful.

Vaping can also harm lung health and lead to respiratory issues and other health complications.

GROWING CONCERN

Recent studies show that a significant number of high school students (as many as one and five, according to the Centers for Disease Control) have experiment-

ed with vaping, drawn in by the allure of trendy devices and flavored liquids.

It's why it is important to provide teens with accurate information about the potential dangers of vaping and encourage open conversations with youth.

A contributing issue is that many parents do not realize that vaping represents a danger to their children. The Partnership to End Addiction said a survey of the parents of middle and high school students found 40% said they were not at all concerned about their child's use of vape products.

They suggest parents watch for signs of vape use that can include vaping equipment, online purchases on their credit card or unusual packages in the mail, scent (such as of chocolate cake, bubble gum or skunk), increased thirst, nose bleeds, interest in stronger flavors, decreased caffeine use, vaping

slang use, social media or other online references, appearance and behavior changes and physical side effects such as trouble breathing, headaches, cough, dizziness, sore throat, chest pain or swollen lips.

PREVENTION

Suggestions for how parents can safeguard their children against vaping include knowing the facts, having calm and reasonable conversations about vaping, trying to understand the why behind its use, conveying expectations, role playing ways to resist use pressure and setting a good example.

It is important to approach vaping as a health issue and not a discipline problem. The Partnership to End Addictions warns parents to resist the urge to scold, lecture or punish. Rather, approach vaping the way you would approach any other health concern. Seeking professional help is often a good idea.