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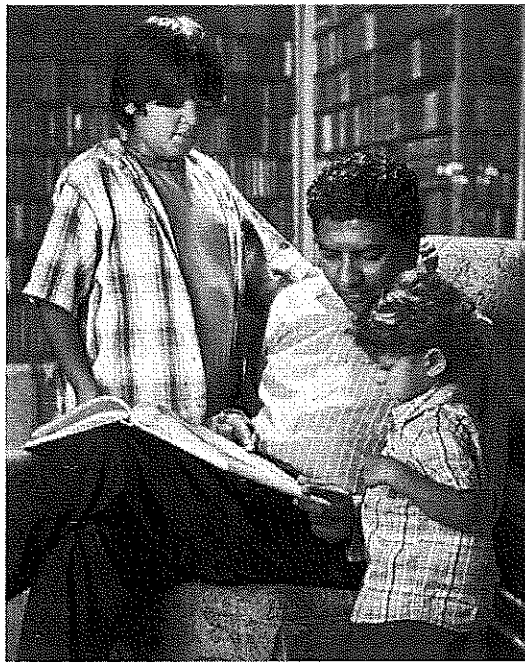
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TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT ALCOHOL & DRUGS

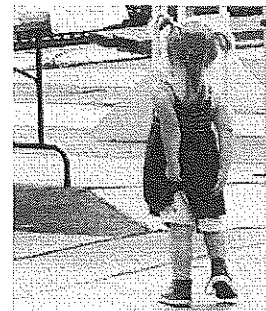
As soon as your child begins to talk, the questions come: "Why is it so big?" "Why is the lady crying?" "Why can't we go fast?" "Why is that man looking scary?" If you show your child that you're ready and interested in giving answers at any time, even if the topics make you uncomfortable, you'll create a trusting relationship and your child will feel comfortable coming to you with concerns and questions because she knows you will take her seriously. She knows you will listen and discuss and offer answers or help find answers.



Teachable moments:

Take advantage of everyday "teachable moments" when time and topic seem to come together and there is opportunity to discuss those difficult subjects:

- If you and your child are walking or driving down the street and you see a group of teenagers drinking and hanging out, take advantage of the moment and ask your child how he/she feels about drinking or that situation.
- Take examples out of the local newspaper or news. Ask your child if he heard about a bust or arrest? Discuss how it affects that person's family or life. Have a conversation about making good decisions.
- Watch television together and discuss characters or events. Take the opportunity to discuss advertising... is it honest or realistic? Watch the news together and discuss events and other serious issues.
- When you see an anti drug commercial or poster or hear a public service announcement on the radio, use it as an opportunity to ask them what they think of those messages.



Clear Rules

Talking to your children about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs with factual information is an important step in keeping them safe and healthy. However, often the other important step is overlooked: making sure that children have clear rules about alcohol, tobacco and drug use. Unless you are clear about your position children may be confused and thus tempted to use. Make sure you explain to them that you love them and these rules are to keep them safe.

Here are some things to keep in mind when making and sticking to the household rules:

BE SPECIFIC:

- Tell your children the rule and what behavior you expect. Remember this is not a one time conversation, but is part of conversations over the years. Let them know that certain behavior is not accepted and why. Let them know the laws regarding alcohol, tobacco and drug use (include prescription use and illegal drug use).
- Develop consequences for breaking the rules. If your children are old enough they can help suggest appropriate and reasonable consequences. It may be very helpful to write up a list of rules and consequences together!

BE CONSISTENT:

- Be sure your children understand that the rules are maintained at all times, and that the rules hold true even at other people's houses. Be sure to enforce the rule every time it is broken. It is important to set a good example. Children notice when their parents and other adults say one thing and do another. For example, if you have a rule that your child is to never ride with someone who has been drinking alcohol, make sure to not drive if you've had a drink.
- Often around the holidays adults will let children "taste" an alcoholic punch or egg nog as part of the holiday celebration... this sends very confusing mixed messages to children about underage drinking.

BE REASONABLE:

Being a good listener also gives you insight into your child's world. Your child will tell you about the sights and sounds that influence him every day... he's the expert about fashion, music, TV, and movies that people his age follow and think are very cool. Ask him what music groups are popular and what their songs are about, what his friends like to do after school, what's cool and what's not and why. Encourage him with phrases such as "that's interesting" or "I didn't know that." Don't hesitate to ask questions like, "Why do you like that..."

During conversations with your child/teen you will find moments where you can steer the conversation to serious issues... even briefly. Any number of topics will give you the opportunity to help your child make choices or better understand a situation. You will have the chance to share facts and solid information when you keep the lines of communication open. The US Department of Education has learned that our teenagers who say they learned a lot about the risks of drugs from their parents are much less likely to try marijuana, for example, than those who learned nothing.