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PREVENT YOUR CHILDREN FROM MISUSING DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

What can you do to prevent your children from misusing drugs and alcohol? Research shows there are several factors that can make a difference. These include:

- **strong, loving family relationships.**
- **identified values and standards of right and wrong.**
- **established rules for behavior that are enforced.**
- **an understanding of the facts about alcohol and drugs.**
- **open communication with children.**

Family values play an important role in whether a child chooses to use alcohol and other drugs. If the family has strong convictions against the use of these substances, children are less likely to use them. Social, family, and religious values give children reasons to say "no" and stick to their decisions.

To make family values clear give examples and explain them specifically. Talk about why values, such as responsibility and honesty, are important. Teach children how each decision builds on previous decisions as one's character is formed.

Parent's actions also impact their children's values. Children copy parental behavior. For example, if parents smoke, the children are more likely to be smokers.

Actions related to alcohol, prescription medicines, and even over-the-counter drugs, reflect attitudes that can shape a child's choice about whether or not to use alcohol and other drugs. Parents should be conscious of their actions and the implications.

This does not mean parents need to stop having wine with dinner or an occasional beer or cocktail. It is important, however, that parents demonstrate responsible behavior in their use of alcohol.

Explain to children the difference between what adults may do legally and what is appropriate and legal for children. It is important to keep that distinction sharp. Do not let children be involved in adult drinking by mixing a cocktail, bringing a beer, or having a sip of a drink.

Sometimes parents send mixed messages. For example, telling a child to say you are not at home because a phone call is inconvenient, in effect, this teaches the child that it is alright to be dishonest.

It should not be assumed children "absorb" family values when they are rarely or never discussed. To clarify a child's understanding, talk about common situations, such as "What would you do if you found someone's wallet on the street?"

Parents are responsible for setting rules that their children follow, as well as enforcing the penalties when the rules are broken. Rules should be specific, consistent, and reasonable. Involve the children in establishing the rules including those that relate to alcohol and drug use.

Before you initiate a discussion, make sure you have current and accurate information about drugs and alcohol. Being well-informed will also provide you with skills to recognize if your children are showing symptoms of having alcohol or drug problems.

Begin to talk to your children about drugs at an early age. Talk, as well as listen. Don't become angry at what your children say and end the discussion. Also pay attention to what they are **not** saying. Ask questions about what is happening at school and in other activities.

To have an effective conversation, your children must feel safe and understand that what they say will not be held against them. Be quicker to praise than to criticize. This helps children to feel good about themselves, develop self-confidence, and trust their own judgment.

Implementing these preventive factors strengthens the family and helps to reduce the chance children will use alcohol and other drugs.