

HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT



Drugs and alcohol— Helping teens make wise choices

With all of the information available to teens, parents may wonder why their children would even consider experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, steroids, or other drugs. But a combination of youthful defiance, fearlessness, curiosity, and peer pressure can lead teens to ignore the risks and make the unthinkable a reality. Understanding the pressures on teens to use drugs and alcohol, and learning to identify the early signs of substance abuse, can help parents tackle this difficult issue.

Why teens try drugs and alcohol

Schools, parents, law enforcement agencies, and anti-drug groups routinely warn of the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately television, music, friends, sports idols, and even some parents often suggest that using drugs or alcohol is “not so bad.” In this confusing environment, teens may view substance abuse as a means to:

- ▶ Open the doors to certain friends or social groups.
- ▶ Have “fun” by drinking or getting high.
- ▶ Feel more like an adult.
- ▶ Experience the thrill of doing something risky.
- ▶ Escape struggles with poor self-esteem, depression, or a troubled home life.
- ▶ Improve performance by staying awake to complete school work, building strength and size to make a sports team, or even believing that drugs may enhance creativity.

Identifying signs of possible trouble

By observing their children’s appearance, behavior, and friends, parents can identify early clues that their children may be experimenting with alcohol or drugs. Although it is important to respect a teen’s desire for independence and personal space, it is equally important for parents to protect children from a potential crisis of substance abuse. These simple ideas may help:

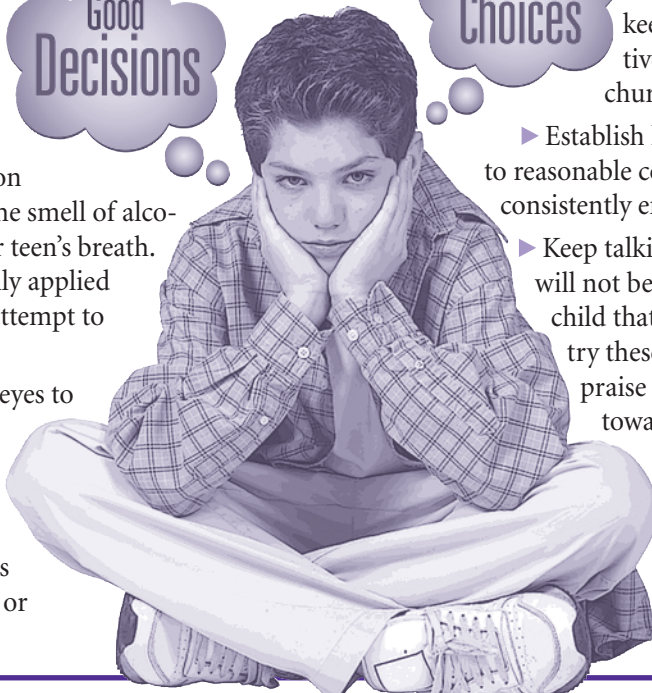
- ▶ **Trust your nose**—A brief face-to-face chat (not a yelled conversation through a closed door) may reveal the smell of alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana on your teen’s breath. Chewing gum, breath mints or freshly applied aftershave or perfume might be an attempt to hide any telltale odors.
- ▶ **Look closely**—Marijuana causes the eyes to become red and heavy lidded with small pupils. Alcohol produces large pupils and gives a red, flushed color to the face and cheeks. Other drugs may cause nose bleeds, sores or spots around the mouth or nose, clothing or skin burns, or needle marks.

- ▶ **Watch for extreme mood changes**—Is your quiet child suddenly loud and obnoxious or your athlete unusually clumsy? Although there are a number of reasons for a child to be moody, remain aware of the possibility of substance use.
- ▶ **Check for physical evidence of trouble**—Unexplained scrapes and dents in the car might suggest your child has been driving under the influence. Bottles, cans, or drug paraphernalia can turn up in the car, a bedroom, the garbage can, or even the laundry.
- ▶ **Be aware of lies or secrets**—Missed curfews or alibis and explanations that don’t fit may suggest that your child is hiding something more serious.
- ▶ **Monitor school performance**—Declining grades or a sudden disinterest in hobbies or sports may be signs that the desire to get drunk or high has become a top priority in a teen’s life.
- ▶ **Missing alcohol, cigarettes, prescriptions, money, or valuables**—Substance abuse is expensive. Teens may start out sneaking alcohol or cigarettes from their parents and end up stealing money or valuables to buy their own.
- ▶ **Trust your instincts with friends**—Teens make new friends all of the time; it’s natural. But if the new friends give you reasons to worry, it might be time to pay closer attention to them.

Preventing substance use

Benjamin Franklin’s expression, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” holds true when it comes to helping teens make wise choices. Sound parenting skills offer your teen a strong defense against the pressures of drugs and alcohol. Some simple suggestions include:

- ▶ Begin talking with your child at an early age regarding alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs before the temptation to experiment strikes. Be clear that using drugs or alcohol is both illegal and unacceptable.
- ▶ Avoid idle time and boredom by keeping your teen involved in positive activities such as sports, clubs, or church or civic groups.
- ▶ Establish household rules for your teen. Agree to reasonable consequences for bad behavior, and consistently enforce the rules.
- ▶ Keep talking with your teen. One conversation will not be enough. Occasionally remind your child that you are aware of the pressures to try these substances. And don’t forget a little praise for good behavior can go a long way toward avoiding trouble.
- ▶ Know your child’s friends. Friends who avoid cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs reinforce your message that not everyone “is doing it.”



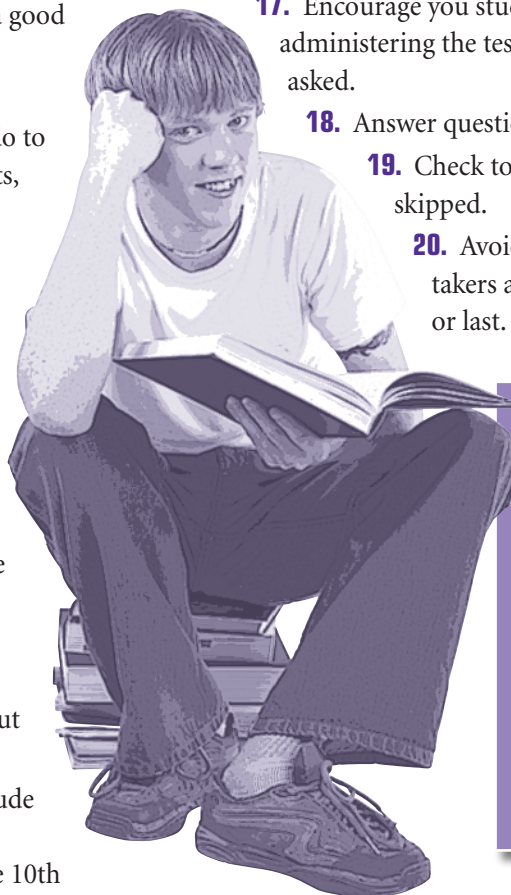


20 STEPS

to Help Your Student Prepare for Tests

While SAT exams are important for getting into college, the results of ALL tests given throughout the high school career add up to the final grade point average that all post-secondary schools look at. To help students prepare adequately for tests (teacher-made or standardized), parents can do several things to provide support and help create a positive test-taking experience.

1. Encourage your student to study over a period of time rather than "cram" the night before.
2. Encourage your student to listen carefully to all test-taking directions given by the teacher and to ask questions about those directions that are not clear.
3. See that your student gets his/her regular amount of sleep before the tests and is, in general, well rested.
4. Make sure that your student eats his/her usual breakfast on the day of the test. Hunger can detract from a good test performance.
5. Encourage your student to do his/her best.
6. Find out from his/her teacher what you can do to help your student feel better about taking tests, if your student is nervous at test time.
7. Make sure that your student is in school during the testing sessions. Do not plan any doctor or dental appointments on test dates.
8. Make sure that you are aware of your student's performance and that you can help interpret the results to your student when test results become available from teacher.
9. Remember to keep well informed about your student's tests. Know how test results are used, and how they will affect your student's placement in school.
10. If there are major differences between standardized test scores and school grades, find out why.
11. The PSAT is the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test. You may hear this test referred to as the practice SAT or a junior SAT. It is taken in the 10th



& 11th grade. The PSAT will give an idea of how students we likely to perform on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). There is also a PACT+ or a Preliminary, or American College Testing Program Assessment.

12. PSAT also serves two other important functions. First, PSAT scores and grades are used to identify students to receive National Negro Merit Scholarship and scholarships from the National Hispanic Scholars Awards Program. Second, they are used, along with other criteria, to qualify for consideration for appointment to military academies.
13. The two major college admissions tests are the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) developed for the College Board by Educational Testing Service and the American College Testing Program Assessment (ACT). Students may want to take both examinations in order to increase their flexibility in applying to college. Some colleges will accept the score from either test; other colleges will require one or the other.
14. Students should take the SAT, or ACT test at least once in the junior year. Ask the school or the Education Specialist in your Urban League affiliate for information on fee waivers.
15. Results of standardized test such as the SAT can be obtained from the test developer. Answer sheets and booklets can be obtained. Reviewing them will help determine your student's strengths and weakness.
16. The best way to prepare for tests is to study, know the work, and take the right courses.
17. Encourage you student to ask questions of the person administering the test if he or she is unsure of what is being asked.
18. Answer questions completely and in detail.
19. Check to be sure no questions have been skipped.
20. Avoid becoming distracted by other test takers and don't worry about who finishes first or last.

College TIP

Students must prepare their college application carefully. Follow the instructions and **PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DEADLINES!** Be sure to ask your counselor and teachers at least two weeks before your application deadlines to submit the necessary documents to colleges (your transcripts, letters of recommendation, etc.)