

TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

#6

9/05

Teens and Substance Abuse

TEENS AND DRUGS:

Teens like to test out different personalities, behaviors, friends and habits. And most teens, at some time, have to make decisions about drinking and trying drugs. These decisions are especially important for teens whose parents have drug problems.

You can help your teens understand that they are at high risk for problems because of their family history. But they can make healthy choices that let them steer clear of drugs. Help get them involved in fun activities, like playing a sport, when there is no school. Talk about ways to tell friends “no” when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. Teach them healthy ways to deal with stress and bad feelings.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

There are things you can do to make parenting a teenager a little easier:

- **BE CONSISTENT** – a warm, caring home life with clear rules and expectations that stay the same helps teens face hard times. With all the changes they are facing, it helps to know there is a place they can count on to stay the same.
- **WORDS, NOT ACTION** – Help teens find ways to cope with anger, fear and frustration. Maybe they like to write and would like to keep a journal. Or perhaps they prefer to draw or talk with a friend when they feel they are losing control. During a calm time, work together to make a plan the teen can use when bad feelings start becoming bad behavior.
- **LISTEN** – Teens from substance-abuse homes need the chance to talk about what happened in the past. Do not push too hard, and save your questions for the right moment. Show you are a good listener by asking general questions and not interrupting. You might also want to consider a professional counselor or support group.
- **PRAISE GOOD BEHAVIOR** – So often, we yell at bad behavior, but forget to talk about what is good. Do not worry if there is nothing big to cheer about – start with the little things. Thank a teen for doing his homework without you nagging. Or for keeping her room neat or helping out with dinner. When teens understand they will get your attention for good behavior, they will begin to behave better.
- **SET CLEAR CONSEQUENCES** – Let your teen know what will happen when a rule is broken. Act quickly and fairly, every time. Try grounding or taking away privileges (like telephone or phone time). These work better than spanking or other physical punishment.

- **DECIDE WHAT TO IGNORE** – Learn to choose your battles. It may be more important to fight about drinking alcohol than about a haircut. Figure out what behaviors you can let slide, and save your energy for the important things.
- **OFFER REASSURANCE** – Tell your teen that you love them and will protect them, and that you will not make them leave.

For more information or to discuss this topic, please call Families And Children Together (FACT) at 1-866-298-0896 and ask for a Maine Kids-Kin staff person.

This information is excerpted from the National Organization on Fetal alcohol Syndrome's website at <http://www.nofas.org/>