

Improve Communication with Your Kids



Research shows that parents are the most powerful catalyst in deterring their children from abusing substances. Communication happens through not only our words – but also our behavior. Here are some suggestions for verbal and nonverbal communication:

Verbal:

- Encourage your children to feel comfortable telling you about problems and asking for help.
- Communicate Clear Standards. Be absolutely clear that you don't want your kids using alcohol or other drugs. Don't leave any room for misinterpretation. Start out by saying:
"I love you and don't want anything bad to happen to you. You can always come to talk to me. I'll be there to listen. I want you to stay healthy. Alcohol and other drugs cause harm to your body and your developing mind. They can mess up your life in other ways – court hearings and fines, create financial problems and even kill you. I trust you and know that you will make responsible decisions and not use alcohol or drugs."
- Focus on content, not on delivery – don't be distracted by grammar or manners
- Use a caring tone of voice to answer a child and use encouraging phrases to express interest and to keep the conversation going.

Nonverbal:

- Give nonverbal support and encouragement by leaning forward and nodding periodically with good eye contact. Do not fold your arms across your chest.
- Set the right example with your behavior. Remember, children do what you do.
- Be careful not to overly glamorize a home bar. Some people go out of their way to build their own bar in the home or even outside during the summer. Making that a centerpiece for the family can send unhealthy messages to your growing teen.
- Remember that even subtle behavior – such as having a drink after work in front of your child – can give a message about how you cope with stress. This doesn't mean you can't have a beer in front of them. But be mindful of how many and how often and make sure you communicate verbally at the appropriate time why – as an adult – it's ok for you to have alcohol in moderation.

Listening

- Make yourself available. Try not to reschedule your time with your children unless absolutely necessary.
- Listen when your child speaks to you about their day. You may want to know and feel exactly what they are going through but most likely you can't. Often, it's best to reflect that you are sorry about what they are going through and ask "How can I help?"

- Stop other activities and put your smart phone away!
- Stop talking and give your child an opportunity to complete his/her thoughts.
- Listen to the total message before forming a response.
- Try rephrasing a child's comments to indicate that you have understood. (I hear you saying that your friends are curious about alcohol and you don't know what to do).
- Don't interrupt. If unclear, ask for further explanation before responding.