

Parent Information Packet

We understand that right now is a very difficult time for you and your child. You have just discovered that your child is using drugs and/or alcohol. Try to remain clam and approach your child in the best way possible.

We know it is a scary time but you are in the right place with people who want to help you and your child. We can help you plan and determine what to do, how to gather information and get help for your child.

If you think this conversation will be uncomfortable for you, imagine how uncomfortable it will make your child. Be prepared for your teen to say things to shock you, to flat-out deny even the most convincing evidence, accuse you of distrust, and more. It's a good idea to think about how you're going to handle these responses

- The most important thing is to keep the conversation going
- Resolve to remain calm, no matter what your teen says
- Try not to be baited to respond with anger of your own
- If the conversation gets too heated, end it and bring it up later
- If you find the discussion is too emotional and heated and not productive, figure out what you need to do for you or your child to calm down. For some people it may be walking away temporarily or putting the conversation on hold; for some it may be counting to ten or taking a deep breath. Figure out what's going to work best for you and your child before you start the conversation. If you're struggling, talk to a counselor to help you find de-escalation techniques that are effective and work naturally for you.
- Don't forget to tell your teen that you love them, and this is why you are concerned.

While it's good to open up the conversation with your teen in any capacity, your conversation will probably go more smoothly if you have a desirable outcome in mind. It's a good idea to keep your expectations low - it's probably not realistic to expect your teen to admit to use immediately and pledge to stop. But a more reasonable objective, like simply expressing that you don't want them to use, can be a small triumph.

- Try not to have unrealistic expectations
- Your teen will probably not admit to use
- Set a small goal and move toward it
- Simply expressing to them that you don't want them using is a good goal

It's a good idea to think through the rules you would like to set-and what the consequences of breaking them will be-before you sit down to have a talk with your teenager. That way you'll be able to clearly define what you would like the goal of your conversation to be, and you can set a clear next step. For tips on this, be sure to visit the Set Limits section.

- Have an idea of the rules and consequences you'd like to set going in
- Listen to your teen's feedback and let him help negotiate rules and consequences
- Be sure your spouse knows about and is prepared to enforce these rules

- Don't set rules you will have no way of enforcing

Drug and alcohol dependence can happen to anyone. But if there is a history of addiction - cocaine, alcohol, nicotine, etc. - in your family, then your child has a much greater risk of developing an addiction. As a parent you need to be aware of this elevated risk and discuss it with your child regularly, as you would with any disease.

- Explain to your teen that while he may be tempted to try drugs, the odds are really against him. His genes make him more vulnerable and he could easily develop a dependence or addiction.
- Don't deny addiction in your family. Use it as a way to talk to your child and regularly remind her of her elevated risk.

It's very important that teens feel supported at all times by their parent. Be sure to let your child know that he or she can always count on you and come to you for support. Remind them that you are always there to offer guidance.

- Reassure your child that they can confide in or seek advice from you when they are stressed or dealing with a personal issue - this can help diminish their desire to use.
- As angry or frustrated as you feel, try to speak from a place of love, caring and concern - and express these feelings to your teen.
- Explain to your child that the reason you're talking with them and asking questions is because you love them and care about them and want them to be healthy and successful.

Find out the extent of the problem

Your child's drug use can be an act of teenage rebellion, a sign of full-fledged addiction, or anything in between. What you need help with first is identifying the actual problem. Professionals can use methods to help you pinpoint the issue you're dealing with. These methods will also help you decide the best course of action for your child:

- **Drug and Alcohol Assessment**
This is a phone interview or face-to-face meeting between the user and a professional in substance abuse. It is usually conducted at or by a treatment facility, but Putnam County Schools has a Coordinator of Drug Prevention and Education who can provide this assessment at your child's school or at the Board of Education in Winfield.
- **Evaluation or Screening**
This is an extensive assessment in which a user stays at a treatment center for a few days to be observed by experts. He or she also takes part in a series of tests during this time.
- **Drug Test**
While home drug tests can be helpful, having a doctor perform a drug test can be a helpful tool as well. Although be aware that teens find all sorts of ways to beat these tests and even professional tests can be inaccurate.

Why does my child need help?

Whether your child is addicted to drugs, uses them infrequently, or was just "experimenting" one time with friends, a problem exists. It is far more dangerous for an adolescent to use drugs or alcohol than an adult — because their brain and body are still growing, doing drugs or drinking can take a permanent, irreversible toll on a kid. And because their brains are not fully developed, teens do not always make the best decisions. When you add alcohol or drugs to the mix, the consequences can be deadly. That's why you need to step in now and make sure that your child speaks and listens to all the various people who can help him quit using.

Who can help my child?

Kids — especially teenagers — often think of their parents as "overbearing" or "nagging." If your child hears the same information you're trying to give him from someone of authority, he may be more inclined to listen.

- **Counselor/Coordinator of Drug Prevention and Education**
Many kids who use drugs have other problems in their lives. Some are stressed about school. Some feel very alone or have been deeply affected by family issues, such as divorce. And more than half of adolescent drug abusers also suffer from a (usually undiagnosed) psychological disorder, like depression or bipolar disorder. A school counselor, drug counselor, or therapist can help your child pinpoint and discuss the underlying issues behind his/her drug or alcohol use.
- **Sports Coach**
Your kid's coach is much more than just someone who runs practices and calls plays. He/she is the person who will be first to notice changes in your child's athletic abilities, appearance, motivation, and behavior if your kid continues using drugs. You can enlist a coach's help in monitoring your child, or you can ask the coach to speak to your child about how their drug use negatively affects their body, their performance, and their team as a whole.
- **Member of the Clergy**
Because many drug users rely on clergy for assistance during recovery, many clergy members are now being professionally trained to help those battling addiction. If your family has been at the same place of worship for a long time, your child may feel comfortable opening up about their problems to someone they know very well and who he is sure won't judge him.
- **Caring Adult**
Many adolescent substance abusers say they used drugs or drank during hard times because they had no one else to go to. Your child may be in serious need of someone to talk to in order to alleviate her stress in a healthier way. A teacher, family friend, aunt or uncle, or other adult that your teen trusts may be able to lend the listening ear and shoulder to cry on that your child is seeking.
- **Pediatrician /Family Doctor**
Ask your child's doctor to give your child a talk about drugs and alcohol and their lasting effects on the body (be sure to mention this when you schedule the appointment so the doctor is prepared). Remember: For confidentiality reasons, a doctor can't tell you what

your child disclosed, but he/she can persuade your kid to quit using casually or to get help if the problem is more serious.

- **Treatment Center**

If your child's drug and/or alcohol use has started causing serious and recurring problems, it's time to start looking into intensive treatment programs. Both in- and outpatient programs provide the stability, education, discipline, and counseling adolescents need to get better. Locate a treatment facility near you (listed in this handout).

Getting help for you and your spouse/partner

In order to help your child tackle their drug problem, you (and your partner) must be healthy and in a clear state of mind. However, many parents lose the ability to think and act rationally when they have a child in danger. Some parents become so obsessed with their child and their problem that they neglect the other important aspects of their own lives: their jobs, physical health, and other kids. It is therefore as vital that you seek help for your own emotional well-being as it is for your drug-using child.

- Support Groups such as Parents Against Addiction, Al-Anon, etc.
- Therapist or Coordinator of Drug Prevention and Education of Putnam County Schools
- Treatment Centers offer support to families

Getting help for the rest of the family

Drug addiction affects more people than just the addict. Even if your non-drug-using children seem okay, chances are they're harboring some resentment towards their sibling and you for his destructive behavior or all the attention he's receiving, or may live in fear of the drug user's unknown future. These negative feelings are detrimental to both the user and the other family members. By getting help to make sure that your other children are emotionally stable and fully comprehend their brother or sister's situation, you're aiding in everyone's recovery and healing process. It also helps the non-using sibling to have his feelings of resentment and anger validated. They have a right to be angry, frustrated and hurt about the situation. They can utilize the following:

- School counselor, Coordinator of Drug Prevention and Education
- Caring Adults (teachers, coaches, friends' parents, aunts, uncles)
- Support Groups (Parents Against Addiction, New Beginnings, Al-Anon, Ala-Teen)

I'm too embarrassed to tell others about my child's drug use because of the stigma

It is unfortunate and understandable that you may feel a little embarrassed by telling others of your child's drug use, but the reality is that you must put your child's health first.

Substance use and abuse does not have the same negative stigma it once did. If you treat your child's drug or alcohol problem like a health issue and not a behavioral one, most others will follow suit. There will always be people who believe drug users are "bad people," but it's not up

to you to worry about their views. It is up to you to keep your child healthy and out of harm's way.

Remember: As a parent, you are your child's biggest advocate! If you are too embarrassed to talk about his drug problem and get him help, no one else is going to do it. You are the person who can make a world of difference in this situation.

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