

## **How to talk to your kids about using drugs and alcohol (when you suspect there is a problem)** **by Steve Danzig LMSW-CC, LADC, CCS**

Research shows that parents are central to preventing teen alcohol/drug use. In fact, kids themselves say that losing their parents' trust and respect are the most important reasons not to use alcohol/drugs. In several studies, kids have also said that if their parents asked them about their alcohol/drug use, they would be so relieved to unburden themselves that they would tell their parents the truth. So if you suspect, or know, that your child has been drinking or using drugs, initiate a discussion with your child immediately. Start by telling your teen that you LOVE him/her and are worried that he/she might be using drugs or alcohol.

During this discussion, try not to get mad or accuse your child of being stupid or bad or an embarrassment to the family. In addition, try not to make the discussion an inquisition, simply try to connect with your teen. Knowing that kids are naturally private about their lives, try to find out what's going on in your child's life that might have led him/her to use alcohol/drugs. Find out if friends or others offered your child alcohol/drugs at a party or at school. Did they try it out of curiosity, or did they take initiative to use alcohol/drugs for some other reason? Also ask: When was the last time he/she used alcohol/drugs? What exactly are they using, how much, and how often? And has he/she done anything that they regret?

After hearing them out and learning all you can about their usage, say that: you KNOW that drugs may seem like the thing to do, but drinking and using drugs can have serious consequences. And that it makes you FEEL worried and concerned about them. Also, be sure to express that you are there to LISTEN to them. However, you should also make it clear that you WANT them to stop drinking/using drugs and that you are willing to HELP them to do so. Even if your child continues to use alcohol/drugs after your discussion, if they learned from that talk that they can trust you, they will turn to you for help when they are ready to stop or when they get into trouble.

It is also important for you to know that if you are a parent struggling with this issue, you do not have to battle this alone. There are licensed alcohol & drug counselors ("LADC") in our community that specialize in working with teenagers that can assist you in a variety of ways. For example, if your discussion with your teen does not go as well as you planned, you can make an appointment for your child to talk to the therapist instead. Oftentimes it is easier for kids to talk with a stranger about issues they may feel some shame about than to talk with their parents. Conversely, if your talk goes well and you need help learning about treatment options for your child, the therapist can perform an evaluation on your child and then recommend the best treatment option for them. Lastly, if your child refuses to stop using or to get help, as the parent of this teen, you can go to counseling to get expert advice on how to handle the situation with your teen in addition to having a safe, supportive place to unburden your feelings about what is happening.

*Published in the Raymond Roadrunner newspaper – August 2007.*