

Parents can take steps to prevent teen drug abuse

By: Dr. Curtis Walling

One more scary story about the widespread nature of drug use hardly seems necessary. But I am betting you are ready for a change.

As a psychologist treading youth in the Adolescent Substance Abuse Program for the past dozen years, I can only hope that the scary stories that hit the newspapers are still shocking many parents to action. But what actions to take?

Most parents already know the basics: Inform yourself about drugs, keep communication open, set the proper example. This is a great start and good common sense. but parents worry if these basics are enough. here are five highly effective and practical steps parents can take:

Remember whose house it is. It is your house. Your children are not paying the mortgage or the rent. Reserve the right to enter and inspect your children's rooms at any time. Establish this rule from the start and there will be no complaint. Wait until your children are older and then try to inspect "their" rooms and you will hear all about an "invasion of privacy." But do you want to "invade their privacy" or do you want to risk having them hide drugs somewhere in your own home - the most common place youth hide their drugs.

Reserve the right to a veto power over all choices for friends. Use this veto power sparingly, and only with a good cause. If you have from the start reserved the right to approve your child's friends, you will be able to use your "veto" when absolutely necessary.

Maintain adult supervision of your children during after-school hours. We know that the after school hours of 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. are the most common time when youth begin using and then continue using drugs. Working parents must find some means of ensuring adult supervision. After-school activities such as sports and clubs are now abundant, and many are free. If these activities are not possible, extend your circle of friends, family, neighbors and other responsible adults until you find adult supervision for after-school hours.

Spend plenty of time with your children. One of the most harmful euphemisms of our generation is "quality time." time is a quantitative concept. All youth simple need a lot of it. Research now reveals "quality time" to be a myth. Spend a lot of time with your children in a variety of activities and settings. Make your home a place where your children and their friends want to congregate.

Reserve the right to use urine drug testing. Are you entitled to require this of your child? Of course. Families are not democracies. You are in charge, the leader. Parents who try to buy peace in their home by (only) being "buddies" with their children can no longer establish the rules that all youth need. One of the rules must be "No drugs or alcohol," and since people who use drugs and alcohol are not honest you must reserve the right to require proof from your children. Parents can find affordable and effective urine drug testing kits designed for home use for only a few dollars on the Internet. Buy some and make sure your kid knows you will use them if necessary.