

From the desk of the School Social Worker...

Talking With Kids about Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

During the month of October, Volusia County schools will participate in the Red Ribbon Celebration that brings millions of people together to raise awareness about alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse prevention. It is the largest prevention campaign observed annually in the United States. The Red Ribbon Pledge is “no use of illegal drugs, no illegal use of legal drugs.” In coordination with our emphasis on prevention, parents may want to use this opportunity to talk to their children about alcohol and other drug abuse. Here are some ideas to consider:

Separate Fact from Fiction: The issue of alcohol and other drugs can be confusing to young children. If drugs are so dangerous, then why is the family medicine cabinet full of them? And why do TV, movies, music, and advertising often make drug and alcohol use look so cool? We need to help our kids distinguish fact from fiction.

Provide age-appropriate information: Make sure the information that you offer fits the child's age and developmental stage. When your 6 or 7-year-old is brushing his teeth, you can say, "There are lots of things we do to keep our bodies healthy, like brushing our teeth. But there are also things we shouldn't do because they hurt our bodies, like smoking or taking medicines when we are not sick." If you are watching TV with your 8 year-old and marijuana is mentioned on a program, you can ask, "Do you know what marijuana is? It's a bad drug that can hurt your body." If your child has more questions, answer them. If not, let it go. Short, simple comments said and repeated will get the message across.

Establish a clear family position on drugs: It's okay to say, "We don't smoke because it's bad for our health" or "Children in this family are not allowed to drink alcohol. The only time that you can take any drugs is when the doctor or Mom or Dad gives you medicine when you're sick."

Be a good example: Children will do what you do much more readily than what you say. So be mindful of the way you handle your stress and even celebrations. Your behavior should model healthy choices.

Keep all medications in places your child can not access: Accidental overdoses continue to be a hazard for young children and abuse of over the counter and prescription drugs is a very real problem with young people today.

Build self-esteem: Kids who feel good about themselves are much less likely than other kids to turn to alcohol and other drugs. As parents, we can do many things to enhance our children's self-image:

- If you need to criticize your child, talk about the action, not the person. If your son gets a math problem wrong, it's better to say, "I think you added wrong. Let's try again."
- Spend one-on-one time with your child. Setting aside at least 15 uninterrupted minutes lets your child know you care.
- Say, "I love you." Nothing will make your child feel better.
- Praise your child for jobs well done.

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RAISING A DRUG FREE KID

Here are some great websites for parents to find out information on talking to your kids about drugs:

www.drugfreeaz.com

www.talkingwithkids.org

www.theantidrug.com

www.acde.org