

## **Thriving During the Teenage Years - Just Saying No Is Only the Beginning**

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Being an effective parent can feel like a real uphill battle. This can be particularly true when our children are adolescents. A major challenge for parents of adolescents is that their developmental tasks include shifting from dependence to independence and experimentation. As a result, issues related to compliance with parental requests and experimentation with drugs, alcohol and other risky behaviors often make this a very difficult time. Both the challenge and solution for parents is to remain firm in their efforts to provide guidance to their children as early as possible, even when it seems most unwelcome.

Consider experimentation with marijuana. Local surveying of high school youth typically indicates that almost half have tried marijuana. Some youth and health service providers believe that these percentages are underestimates. Many parents of adolescents indicate that they too experimented with marijuana in their youth. Thus the conclusion often drawn is that teens will be teens and experimentation is inevitable, so why fight a losing battle? The more road blocks, through open discussion and efforts to provide firm boundaries, the better the chances are that *your* child will either not engage in this behavior or if they do, will hopefully not “over engage” to the point of irrevocable results. It is very difficult, for example, for the most expert professional to predict which youth will simply experiment with substances like marijuana and move on and who will develop lifelong patterns of chemical dependency. Similarly, we also know that marijuana is the second-most frequently found drug (after alcohol) involved in automobile accidents and the primary substance abused by adolescents in drug treatment.

It is also important to note that even the most vigilant parent may be unable to prevent their child from developing substance abuse problems, but there are steps that you can take to reduce the chances:

- Encourage ongoing discussions about substance use. Research shows that kids whose parents talk with them regularly about drugs and alcohol are 50 percent less likely to use them. For tips on effective ways to have this conversation, check out: [www.TalkingWithKids.com](http://www.TalkingWithKids.com) and [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com).
- Be clear that any experimentation with drugs/alcohol is unacceptable. For students who believed their parents would strongly disapprove, current marijuana use was 5% versus 30% for youth who believed their parents would somewhat disapprove.
- Ask questions about parties that your children attend in terms of drug/alcohol use and adult supervision. When hosting a party understand your legal responsibilities and provide appropriate supervision.
- If you suspect substance use, consider an assessment and/or drug testing to determine the severity.
- Be a good role model. Parental use of drugs/alcohol sends a message that it's OK to do.