Adolescents Still Value Parent Opinions

By Barbara Byers, 4-H Prevention Program Director

As we enter the new school year our children will be renewing old friendships and making new ones. It’s a busy time of year and, as parents, we have to trust that our children will make the right choice based on what we have taught them and do the right thing.

However, SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration) reports that in 2006 16.2% of males ages 12-17 self reported that they had used alcohol in the past month while 17.0% of females had used alcohol. Parents should ask themselves, “Do my children know where I stand on underage drinking?”

We all know teens hardly ever listen to their parents, right? Then you might be surprised to learn that’s a myth when it comes to drinking and drugs. A parent’s opinion is still important to young people.

Teens who know their parents are “very much against” underage drinking usually drink less, have fewer friends who might drink, and have a refusal system compared to young people whose parents are “against” underage drinking.

Adolescents still need structure and clear limits in their lives; as they become more responsible, they can be adapted.

We all like to think of ourselves as good parents but what do our actions really say about us to our children? Hopefully, they are learning how to grow up to be a caring, productive adult with values.

Speak clearly with your child about family values and expectations. Let youth know it is okay for them to blame you for risky behaviors: “My mom would ground me for a month if she even thought I was drinking!” Help them learn how to say “NO” to situations by role playing with them and brainstorming on ways to say “NO”.

Other ways to help support your teen are: remember what it was like to be a teenager; be a good listener and respect their views; relate your experiences but remember not to lecture; encourage them to be an independent thinker; find out the facts so that you can speak with accuracy; state your family’s position on alcohol and drug use; and behave in a way that is consistent with your family position.

And remember, children learn best by watching you and your behaviors.

Power to say NO!

1. Simply say “NO”
   “No, I’d rather not.”
   “No, thanks.”
   “Not me.”
   “No way.”
   “Forget it.”

2. Give a reason.
   “I don’t like the taste.”
   “I don’t feel like it.”
   “Don’t want to ruin my lungs.”
   “I don’t like the feeling of being high and losing control.”
   “I can get high without it.”
   “It’s illegal.”
   “Beer makes me feel sick.”
   “I’m an athlete, so I don’t (drink, smoke, do drugs).”

3. Give an alternative.
   “No, but I’d sure go for a soda.”
   “No, but let’s go outside and talk.”
   “No, but let’s dance instead.”

4. Stand up to pressure.
   “I already said ‘no.’”
   “I really meant it when I said ‘no.’”

5. Leave the scene.
   “No.”
   “I’ve got to go now.”
   “I have to be home in fifteen minutes.”

6. Avoid the scene.
   Avoid those places where you might have to resist — parties, alleys, etc.
   *www.projectalert.com

Need help talking to your child?
Check out the following websites:

www.health.org – National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information

www.theantidrug.com – Parents - The Antidrug

www.talkingwithkids.org – Talk with your kids

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