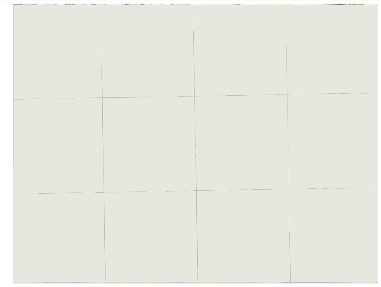


# teenintervene

## Family Guide

by Ken C. Winters, PhD, with Amelia Arria, PhD



These five strategies have been shown to help prevent alcohol and other drug use by adolescents.

- 1 Monitoring
- 2 Appropriate role modeling
- 3 Building a warm and supportive relationship
- 4 Establishing appropriate parent-child communication
- 5 Maintaining awareness of peer relationships

### Five Things You Can Do to Help Your Child Stay Substance-Free during Adolescence

Parents and other adult family members often think that they exhibit less and less influence over the lives of their children as the children become teens. You, too, may think that you now take a back seat to your child's peer influences and friends. However, families are still a vital part of a teenager's life. The *Teen Intervene* program aims to discuss and help support effective parenting practices and provide parents with emotional support during this time of need.

Research strongly supports the fact that families play a meaningful and continuing role in shaping an adolescent's behavior, including their decision to use or not use alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs. While there are no guarantees that a child will not use, studies have identified five key prevention strategies families can use to increase the likelihood of raising a healthy teenager.

#### Healthy Parenting Skills

If you suspect your child may be at risk for using alcohol and other drugs or has used in the past, we encourage you to read over this guide. We encourage you to adopt these five strategies in your everyday life. If you already do these things as part of your parenting, then this information should strengthen your commitment to your teenager.



## 1

## Monitoring

Parental monitoring is defined as knowing the general whereabouts of your child at all times, *especially* when school is out for the day.

### STRATEGY 1:

#### Monitoring

One of the most consistent and robust findings in adolescent alcohol and other drug prevention literature is the strong association between parental monitoring and a lower risk for use among children. It's simple: more effective monitoring and supervision of children lowers the risk of their use of alcohol or other drugs. Let's look at what "monitoring" actually means.

Parental monitoring is defined as knowing the general whereabouts of your child at all times, *especially* when school is out for the day. As you might guess, a high-risk period for teen alcohol and other drug use takes place after school. Proper parental monitoring includes being aware of the activities in which your child is engaged and also

being present during recreational events such as school sport activities. For many families, attending school and sport events may be difficult, if not impossible. If you can't attend your child's school or recreational events, express your desire to your child that you wish you could attend the events, and continue to monitor your child's whereabouts at all times.

Research shows that it is also very important to monitor your child's health and well-being in critical areas of functioning, such as academic performance and school connectedness. Families should make every effort to strengthen their child's attachment to school and to promote academic success. Several studies have shown that school engagement (such as participation in extracurricular activities) and academic achievement are *strong protective factors* for prevention of alcohol or other drug involvement. "Protective factors" are things that protect and shelter

your child from risks of use. Early academic problems and school failure are among the strongest predictors of early alcohol or other drug use. The earlier a child uses alcohol or other drugs, the higher the likelihood of that teen developing a serious substance use problem later in life.

## STRATEGY 2:

### Appropriate Role Modeling

We don't need research to tell us that children imitate their parents. But we may need to be reminded that children imitate not only healthy behaviors but also unhealthy behaviors. This includes alcohol and other drug use. One way to model healthy adult drinking behavior for your teen is by consuming small amounts of alcohol with a meal or under celebratory circumstances, such as your birthday. By modeling this type of behavior, your child will see you drink in a moderate way, without extremes, and not as an unhealthy coping



strategy when you're angry, extremely tired, or sad.

Speaking in an open way about alcohol is another healthy modeling behavior. Modeling openness can strongly influence your child's attitude. Talk openly with your child about your own use of alcohol and let your child talk freely about the use of alcohol or other drugs they have seen and any opportunities to use they may have experienced at or after school.

Another area where it is important to model healthy behaviors is while regulating emotions and reacting to stress. These behaviors are indirectly linked to alcohol and other drug use. How you, as an adult, cope with stressful situations or manage your emotions is visible to your child. Your child will learn to express stress and emotions by witnessing your behaviors.

2

### Appropriate Role Modeling

Children imitate not only healthy behaviors but also unhealthy behaviors. This includes alcohol and other drug consumption.

**STRATEGY 3:****Building a Warm and Supportive Relationship**

Children who have warm and supportive relationships with their families are less likely to engage in alcohol or other drug use. As a result, it's especially important to establish a close relationship with your child early on in their development. Some studies have shown that weak bonds or early parental rejection begins a negative cycle of parent and child interactions.

For older adolescents, maintaining closeness remains important. One research study shows that having a close relationship will make it easier and produce less conflict when the time comes for you to monitor your child's behavior and selection of peers more closely as the child ages. If your relationship with your child has been stormy for a long time, it's never too late to create a closer, more intimate, and supportive relationship. Your child may have some ideas of their own on how to build such a relationship. Talk to your child and engage them in building and living a relationship that everyone in the family can be happier with.

The following characteristics are common in close relationships:

- discussing shared interests (such as sports or music)
- engaging in academic or extra-curricular activities together

**3****Building a Warm and Supportive Relationship**

A close relationship will make it easier and produce less conflict when the time comes for you to monitor your child's behavior and selection of peers more closely as the child ages.

- low levels of conflict when communicating
- working through challenges together
- honest and direct communication
- encouragement for achievements (small and large)
- allowance for an appropriate degree of autonomy and independence
- teaching basic life skills (such as handling finances and dealing with unwanted peer pressures)

On the other hand, several studies show that family conflict and harsh discipline increase the risk for alcohol and other drug use.

#### STRATEGY 4:

### Establishing Appropriate Parent-Child Communication

Talking to your children about alcohol and other drugs is important. Research studies show that two things happen when parents respectfully express disapproval of alcohol and other drug use: (1) there is a *decreased* risk of using and (2) there is a *reduced* likelihood that the teen will transition from experimentation to more regular or heavy alcohol and other drug use.

It is also important for families to provide information to their children about the health and safety risks of alcohol and other drug use. You need to keep yourself informed about alcohol and other drug trends, such as the nonmedical use of

## 4

### Establishing Appropriate Communication with Your Child

It is important for parents to provide information to their children about the health and safety risks of alcohol and other drug use. As a parent or guardian, you need to keep yourself informed about new trends in alcohol and other drug use.





## 5

### Maintaining Awareness of Peer Relationships

A child's peer choices are often influenced by the very nature of the parent or parents' relationship to the child.

prescription drugs, the commercialization of marijuana use, and the rise in vaping. An effective tactic is to ask a child whether they have had the *opportunity* to try different types of drugs, rather than directly ask or challenge the child to see if they have used specific drugs. One study has shown that this strategy of gently inquiring about opportunities may elicit a more fruitful discussion.

#### STRATEGY 5:

#### **Maintaining Awareness of Peer Relationships**

The final component to discuss is the importance of peer influences on child risk behaviors. There is a wealth of research that supports the belief that a child's peer choices are often influenced by the very nature of the child's relationship with their parent(s)/guardian(s). Research has found that a teenager is more likely to spend time with peers who use substances when their relationship with their parent(s)/guardian(s) is highly characterized by conflict.

Here are some practical strategies that may help you maintain awareness of your child's peer relationships:

- engage in light conversations about your child's peers (such as what activities they like, what their personalities are like, etc.)
- share information about your own friends and peers
- have direct conversations with your child's friends (an opportune time to have these conversations is in a car, so if possible, offer to transport your teen's friends)
- discuss the importance of peer choices and the role these choices play in social acceptance
- encourage your child to recognize and intervene when a friend might be having difficulties
- establish communication with the families of your child's closest peers to understand whether their household rules are similar or different from your own, particularly regarding their attitudes and rules on providing alcohol to minors within the household

## Web-Based Resources

If you are interested in learning more about effective parenting, below are some resources:

### **Partnership to End Addiction— [drugfree.org](https://drugfree.org)**

This comprehensive website offers numerous resources to address prevention, treatment, and recovery of adolescent substance use.

### **National Institute on Drug Abuse— <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators>**

This government site contains numerous research-informed articles and videos on adolescent substance use.

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Parent & Caregiver Resources— <https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you/parent-resources>**

This website provides conversation starters about youth and underage drinking and drug use.