

# Health Bulletin:

## Drug-Free Kids



nyc.gov/health

#27 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

### Parents Can Make a Difference

- About half of all children try illegal drugs and most try alcohol.
- Alcohol and drugs are especially dangerous for people under 18.
- Parents can help keep their kids off alcohol and drugs by talking with them often and taking an active interest in their lives.

### Alcohol and Other Drugs Are Especially Harmful to Kids

- Alcohol and drugs can harm physical, mental, and emotional development.
  - They can also lead to car crashes and other injuries.
  - People who start drinking in their teen years are much more likely to become addicted as adults.

### How Can I Keep My Kids Off Drugs?

- Take an active interest in your children.
  - Always know where they are, what they are doing, and who they are with.
  - Talk with them regularly about their activities and goals for the future.
  - Eat family meals with them as often as possible.
- Set rules that take a firm stand on drinking and drugs. A “zero tolerance” policy is easiest to understand and enforce.
- Take advantage of opportunities to talk about alcohol or drugs when the subject comes up on TV or in a movie, on the news, or as part of another conversation.
- One in 5 teenagers has used prescription painkillers to get high. *Why tempt them?* Keep over-the-counter and prescription drugs out of children’s reach.
- Role play with your kids. Act out how they can get out of situations where they are pressured to use alcohol or drugs.
- Don’t let your kids smoke. Nicotine is a highly addictive drug, and children who smoke are much more likely to drink and use other drugs.
- Encourage kids to be active.
  - Children who keep busy with school, sports, hobbies, and religious or community activities are much less likely to drink or use drugs.
  - However, don’t let them get overextended. Even high-achievers can start drinking or using drugs if they feel they’re under too much pressure.

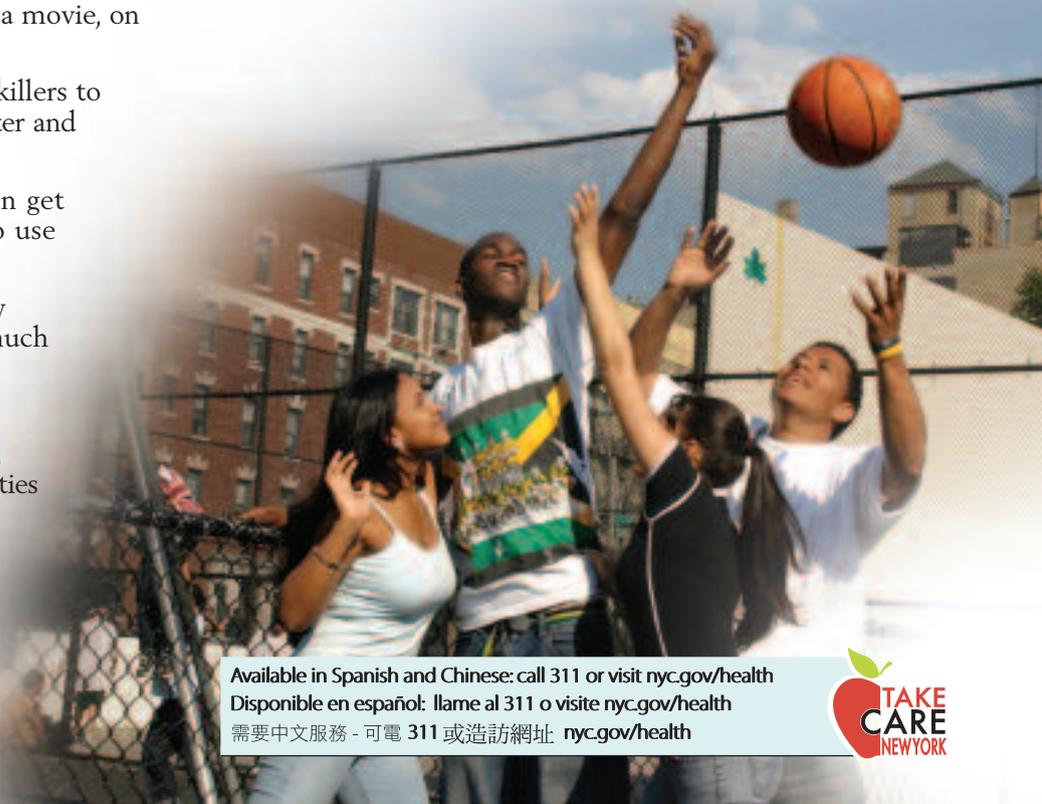
### Set a Good Example

- What parents *do* is more important than what they *say*.
  - Drink alcohol only in moderation – no more than 1 or 2 drinks a day on average. Never get drunk in front of children.
  - Don’t use drugs, even if you think your kids don’t know about it. (They almost always do.)

### How Can I Tell if My Child Is Drinking Or Using Drugs?

#### It isn’t always obvious.

- Parents know it’s normal for teenagers to act a little strange. They frequently:
  - Have mood changes (acting sullen, angry, secretive, or withdrawn).
  - Eat and sleep more, and at odd hours.
  - Suddenly change interests or friends.



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**Pay attention to these behaviors.**

- These signs are stronger indications a child may be drinking or doing drugs:
  - Seeming clumsy, “spacey,” or “out of it.”
  - Lying, stealing, or becoming violent.
  - Breath or clothing smells like alcohol, marijuana, or strong chemicals.
  - Red or heavy-lidded eyes; problems focusing.
  - Unexplained burns or nose bleeds (from smoking or snorting drugs).
  - “Track marks” on arms or legs from injecting drugs. (Long sleeves in hot weather may be an attempt to hide this.)



- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) or call 311 and ask for information on **Drug-Free Kids**

- For help with substance abuse or mental health problems: call 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3683) or 311

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

- National Institute on Drug Abuse: [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

- Partnership for a Drug-Free America: [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

- The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign: [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com)

- **CALL 911 in any medical emergency**

**311 for Non-Emergency NYC Services  
Telephone Interpretation in 170 Languages**

**What if My Child Has a Problem?**

- It’s normal for parents to feel scared and angry when they find out their kid is drinking or drugging. It’s okay – important, in fact – to state your disapproval and talk about your fear.
- Be careful, though, about how you react. An out-of-control response won’t fix any problems. It will only make everything harder.
- Don’t deliberately exaggerate the bad effects of drugs. Kids will know if you’re not telling the truth.
- Do talk with your child and share your concern.
  - *Be calm.* Even if you’re angry, try not to let your emotions take over.
  - Ask *direct* questions about alcohol and drugs. If you have evidence, say so.
  - Think about what to say *before* you say it. Rehearse with your spouse or a trusted friend. Get support if you need it.
- Never forget to tell your child that you love him or her unconditionally.
- You may be tempted to search your child’s room or belongings.
  - Children and teens need and deserve privacy. But when health is at risk, or in other emergencies, parents sometimes have to make an exception.
- Consider what kind of help your child needs.
  - Sometimes, a serious discussion may be all it takes.
  - You may want to meet with your family doctor or a counselor to discuss if treatment is needed.
  - Rarely, you may need an immediate intervention. Drastic actions such as sending your child to rehab should not be done before talking with a doctor. (Warning! Watch out for drug treatment scams.)

**Health Bulletin: Drug-Free Kids**



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