

Preventing Substance Abuse at Home and at School

Anne S. Robertson

Parents frequently feel that when children become adolescents they need less supervision. However, a recent report by the Research Institute on Addictions suggests healthy adolescent development requires a lot of adult supervision. The report indicates that children raised in a family that is emotionally supportive and that actively monitors their children have lower levels of problem behaviors. According to sociologist Grace Barnes: "Monitoring means knowing where your kids are, who their friends are, when they are coming in, and so on" (Barnes, 1995, p. 1).

A supportive environment where the family openly praises and encourages their children and maintains open communication allows teens to be more receptive to monitoring. This type of family relationship was found in a cross-section of teenagers who had low levels of problem behaviors regardless of race, gender, or family income.

The study also indicated what does not seem to work. Attempting to control or coerce teens is associated with more problem behaviors, particularly if coercion includes physical punishment such as slapping and hitting. At the other end of the continuum, too many rational, logical explanations without concrete guidelines may lead to increased problems, particularly substance abuse (Barnes, 1995, p. 2).

Additionally, the results of a new study sponsored by the Department of Education (Lazarovici, 1997, pp. 1-3) indicates that many of the federally funded drug prevention programs are ineffective for several reasons, such as:

- lack of support or training for teachers and counselors in the area of substance abuse;
- limited time available during the school day for the delivery of effective programs;

- ineffective coordination of programs being implemented within the school or community.

Study results also indicate that few districts used research or were aware of effective programs when they were developing their own programs.

However, there were some successful strategies used in some districts. These programs incorporated parental and community involvement with effective training that was integrated into broad-based school and community programs. The successful aspects of these programs were reflected in research that focused on community-wide efforts to support teens and prevent substance abuse. As a result of these successful programs and other research, the Department of Education is pressing schools that use Safe and Drug-Free Schools money to show that they are using tested methods for their program development (Lazarovici, 1997, p. 3). The evidence on this issue seems clear: when schools and communities collaborate to prevent teen drug abuse, they are more successful in their programming than either group working independently.

Sources

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