

How you can Help a Teen or Adult Avoid Drug and Alcohol Use and Abuse

Drug and alcohol use is dangerous for youth and adults with FASD because they become addicted quickly. For this reason, it is best if they completely avoid using alcohol and illegal drugs. Because alcohol use is widely accepted in our culture and drugs are readily available it is difficult to avoid them. Most Canadians drink some alcohol some of the time but in amounts that do not cause problems. People with FASD may have friends and family members that drink alcohol on a regular basis. Because those with FASD are easily influenced they will want to join in. This is a big problem because of the differences in how their brains work. Addictions are resistant to change and treatment, especially because traditional treatment approaches don't work well for people with FASD. Remember too that they are at greater risk when under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Drug and alcohol misuse can lead to criminal behaviours, victimization, poverty, disrupted relationships and homelessness.

Here are some real life examples...

Example #1:

Your daughter has gone out to a party with friends that you thought were trustworthy. She is 17 and has been taught that drinking is not allowed. When she comes home you can tell that she has been drinking.

How you can help

Stay calm—wait until the alcohol has left her system before you talk about this. Remind your daughter that drinking alcohol is an illegal activity for a 17 year old. Let her know that she does not have to use alcohol to fit in. Teach her about her health and taking care of herself. Help her understand that alcohol will make it hard for her to make good decisions and look after herself. Teach her to never ride in a car if the driver has had anything to drink. Help your daughter to go to events where there will not be drinking. In the future provide additional supervision for parties.

Example #2:

Your 24 year old son has begun a new part time job. He is very eager and wants the job to work out. He begins spending time with 2 of his new coworkers. You notice he smells like smoke quite often. He seems disoriented and confused when he comes home one day. You suspect he has been smoking pot with his new friends though he denies this.

How you can help

People with FASD are easily influenced and learn by watching and imitating what others do. Your son may not have known the difference between cigarettes and pot when he first tried it. He may also be trying to fit in and be accepted by his new coworkers. Remind him that marijuana is illegal and that it is against the law to have it in your pocket, in your home, or to use it. Try to find out if he is using and why he is using pot. This will help you to decide what to do. Some people use pot to feel better about themselves or to calm down.

FASD Tip #18

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Please feel free to photocopy
and use these sheets.

Some Tips and Teaching Strategies:

1. Begin to teach and talk about drugs and alcohol early and often. Use clear and direct language along with real life examples.
2. Be specific about which drinks are alcohol and which drugs are illegal drugs. It can be confusing to know the difference between medicine and illegal drugs.
3. Create family rules about drugs and alcohol. Be a good role model to members of your family.
4. Teens need to know that it is against the law for them to use alcohol or drugs and that it is also against the law to have alcohol or drugs in their backpack, purse, room or car.
5. Help teens and adults to find good role models and friends that do not use drugs and alcohol.
6. Help them to find other activities that are fun and provide opportunity to experience success and feel a sense of belonging. A music group, team sport, or other recreational activity is a good choice and gives them something to do and can build positive experiences.
7. When problems arise, like sadness, boredom or feeling alone, deal with these things in positive ways so that drugs or alcohol are not used to self medicate or dull feelings of emotional pain.
8. Use role play, practice and rehearsal to help teens or adults learn to avoid drugs and alcohol. Practice over and over how to say no and how to stay safe.
9. Have a plan in place to deal with situations where drugs or alcohol are available and they find it is hard to say no to using. Encourage them to phone home or leave immediately.
10. Support a healthy sense of self so teens and adults do not use drugs and alcohol to fit in or be accepted. Encourage safe alcohol-free activities with positive role models.
11. If a person with FASD develops an addiction, contact the Network for information about FASD to share with the addictions counsellor. To improve the chances of success, the counsellor will need to accommodate the unique needs and recognize the brain differences of a person with FASD.
12. Find someone to talk to and to support you. Other parents can share ideas and help you to feel that you are not alone. Call the Network for support.