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Prevention Strategies: Straight Talk About Addictions

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Drug, alcohol and/or tobacco use is rampant in our culture and glamorized by advertising. Because these products are easily accessible, it is not surprising that many adults and some teens turn to them for recreational use, to ease their pain or for a thrill. Alcoholic beverages are relatively cheap and can be bought at the corner grocery store and specialty liquor stores. Although most illegal drugs are expensive, addicts and users don't have any difficulty finding a supplier regardless of whether they live in an urban, suburban or rural area. Tobacco products, which are heavily taxed driving up the cost, are available at every drugstore, gas station and grocery store.

The best way to avoid the power of such an addiction is to never start using! Although schools provide alcohol and drug-free programs with needed and accurate information, parents can also be a valuable resource to help their children avoid drugs and alcohol. Here are a few suggestions for parents to protect their kids.

1. **Lock your liquor cabinet** and/or wine cooler and keep the key from your kids! Don't think for a minute that they are not going to sample a beer, a glass of wine or hard liquor when you are not around! Kids don't need an obvious temptation staring them in face.
2. **Don't offer smokes or alcoholic beverages to underage youth at home** under the guise that you think they are going to try it anyway and you want to monitor them. You are sending the wrong message that it is OK for minors to drink as long as they are in a private home. Adults are breaking the law when alcohol and/or tobacco products are provided to minors regardless of where or when.
3. **Talk to your children** before they are in middle school about the dangers of alcohol, illegal drugs and tobacco products. Your children look up to you as their role model, so control your own use of alcoholic beverages and narcotics.
4. **Be very clear with your teens about rules** regarding use of alcoholic beverages, abuse of prescription drugs or use of illegal drugs. Put your foot down about the use of the family car if there is any evidence of alcohol or drug use. Don't back away from grounding kids and taking away auto privileges for breaking the rules.
5. **Know with whom your kids are hanging out**, where they are going, and when they will return. Depending on your community, it is reasonable to expect your older teens to be home by 9:30 or 10:00 PM on school nights and by 12:00 Midnight on weekends.
6. **If you suspect that a loved one is suffering from an addiction**, get help as soon as possible. Many hospitals have a Behavioral Health Unit, and they will assist with an assessment of your loved one and recommend treatment options. Ask for assistance from a police officer if your loved one becomes violent and out-of-control.
7. **Most communities have resources** such as an Alcoholics Anonymous 12-step program or a Narcotics Anonymous program that meets weekly—often at churches or community centers. To locate a suitable treatment resource, talk to your minister, a licensed mental health professional, or your family doctor.
8. **One final thought:** In the medical and mental health community, addictions are considered a treatable disease; however, in the legal community a person who breaks the law or causes injury or death to someone while under the influence is held accountable and may end up going to jail and/or paying a heavy fine. Make sure your child understands the awful consequences!

If you or anyone in your family needs marriage and family counseling or personal counseling to address changes in your life, check out our web site at www.texasicounselors.com. Our rates are affordable.