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How Friends, Family, and Others Play A Significant Role in a Child's Life

Even if you are not a parent, you can play a significant role in a child's life. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, mentors, and coaches can all help guide a child toward healthy choices at every stage of life.



Wondering how you can build a better relationship with the child in your life?

Put the following tips to work and enjoy the benefits for years to come.

Grandparents

You have the inside scoop on what the parents were like as kids. Help take the pressure to be perfect off of grandkids by telling them stories about their own parents' shortcomings when they were younger.

Aunts and Uncles

As kids get older, they tend to think that their aunts and uncles are somehow just a bit cooler than their parents. The cool factor you possess can help your niece or nephew feel comfortable opening up to you. Let them know that unless you think they are in danger, the things they talk to you about will stay just between the two of you. The best way to start a conversation if you think some-

thing is bothering them is "You do not seem like yourself, lately. Are things going okay?"

Coaches and Mentors

Coaches and mentors typically get to know kids in performance-related activities. They can notice changes in be-

havior and motivation because of this. If a child seems off his or her game or is just acting out of sorts, ask questions like: "What is going on today?" or "How come you are not paying attention?" If you are not satisfied with the answer or your concerns continue, call the primary caregivers to see if they too have noticed any changes in their child.

Out-of-town Relatives

You may not get to see your grandchildren or nieces and nephews everyday, but long distance relatives still have a conversational opportunity when calling the family. From the time kids are small, ask to speak to them on the phone, and as they grow, let them know they can always call you to talk. Once the child has an email address, write to them

regularly with questions about their lives and interests. Do not forget that kids of all ages love to get mail. Let them know you are thinking about them on a regular basis by sending a note.

FYI for All

If you are worried at anytime about the child in your life then try to talk to him or her. Be very genuine and open. Some questions you can ask to start the conversation: "Hey, how are you doing? Is everything okay?" "You seem a little off today" or "You seem to be low in energy. Anything you care to talk about"? Then you might continue with two more questions, "How are things going with your friends"? or "How are things going on the dating scene"? depending on how much information you have received already from your conversation. If they are not ready to talk, do not pressure, but let them know you will check back with them and whenever they are ready to open up you will be there for them.

But if you are truly worried and feel there is a real problem, like drug use or depression, it is better to be safe than sorry. Contact their parents to share your concerns, and see if there is any way you can help. [1]

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Special Interest:

- *Having trouble talking to your teen about the risk of drugs and alcohol?*
- *Use everyday examples to bring up the conversation. TV shows where a teen is drinking and is involved in a car accident or ask why they think some people find movie stars who are going into rehab for the third time cool?*

Fall Semester - A Time For Parents To Discuss College Drinking

As college students arrive on campus this fall, it is a time of new experiences, new friendships, and making memories that will last a lifetime. Unfortunately for many, it is also a time of excessive drinking and dealing with its aftermath—vandalism, violence, sexual aggression, injury, and even death.

According to research summarized in a College Task Force report to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the consequences of excessive drinking by college students are more significant, more destructive, and more costly than many parents realize. And these consequences affect students whether or not they drink.

Statistics from this report, which were updated recently, indicate that drinking by

college students aged 18 to 24 contributes to an estimated 1,700 student deaths, 599,000 injuries, and 97,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape each year.

As the fall semester begins, parents can use this important time to help prepare their college-bound sons and daughters by talking with them about the consequences of excessive drinking.

Some first-year students who live on campus may be at particular risk for alcohol misuse. During their high school years, those who go on to college tend to drink less than their non-college-bound classmates. However, during subsequent years, the heavy drinking rates of college students surpass those of their non-college peers. This rapid increase in heavy drinking over a relatively short period of time can contri-

bute to serious difficulties with the transition to college.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the first six weeks of the first semester are critical to a first-year student's academic success. During these crucial early weeks, parents can do a variety of things to stay involved. They can inquire about campus alcohol policies, call their sons and daughters frequently, and ask about roommates and living arrangements. They should also discuss the penalties for underage drinking as well as how alcohol use can lead to date rape, violence, and academic failure.

For parents who want to talk to their college-bound son or daughter about the consequences of college drinking, a variety of helpful resources are available at

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/> [2]

Monitoring Your Teen's Free Time

Teens are spending more time on their own after school, during school holidays like winter and spring break, and over the summer. They spend less than 20 percent of their waking hours actually in school. At home, more households include a single parent juggling all of the responsibilities or both parents working full-time jobs.

While teens might be enjoying all of their free time, research shows that young people with unsupervised time are three times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs. Unsupervised teens are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as underage drinking, sexual activity, and cigarette smoking than other teens.

You can still keep an eye on your teens, however, and know what they are doing during unsupervised periods. As long as you set clear rules, monitor their activities, and plan ahead, you can help keep your teens safe and out of trouble.

Although the statistics are troubling, you can make a difference by setting clear rules about drug use and other risky behaviors. Parents are the first line of defense when it comes to their teens' safety. Be sure to remain in the know with your teens by monitoring their activities (using technology and other trusted sources around you, like neighbors, friends, and family) to help keep your teens safe when you cannot be with them.

1. Have your child check in. Emphasize the importance of calling or texting throughout the day to know their whereabouts.
2. Address peer pressure. Have regular conversations on how to overcome peer pressure and reinforce what is acceptable and what is not.
3. Be firm. Enforce rules and consequences pertaining to curfew and drug and alcohol abuse.

The more involved parents are in their teens' lives, the more valued teens feel, and the more likely they are to involve parents in their activities. [3]

Internet Use Cutting Into Family Time

The Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communication's annual survey found that in 2008, 28 percent of people said that being wired has resulted in their spending less time with family members. The annual survey, which contacted 2,000 American households in 2005, found that the amount of time family members spent



together averaged about 26 hours a month. That shared time had dropped to just under 18 hours a month by 2008.

Social networks such as Twitter and Facebook exploded in 2007. At that time, more than half of the people online said this online community was as important as their offline community. Certainly a lack of collective experience and face-to-face

time will lead to a breakdown in communication, decreased opportunities to experience the world together, and increased alienation of children. Family breakdown leads to destructive behavior.

Parents need to consciously plan family time, which can include playing computer games together, doing online projects together, having regular family meal times, and participating in regular outings. They also need to monitor their children's online usage. [4]

Why Do Teens Engage in “Sexting?”

One in five teen girls between 13-16 years of age say they have electronically sent, or posted online, nude or semi-nude images of themselves. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com, say these racy images are also getting passed around. One-third of teen boys and one-quarter of teen girls have had nude or seminude images, originally meant to be private, shared with them.

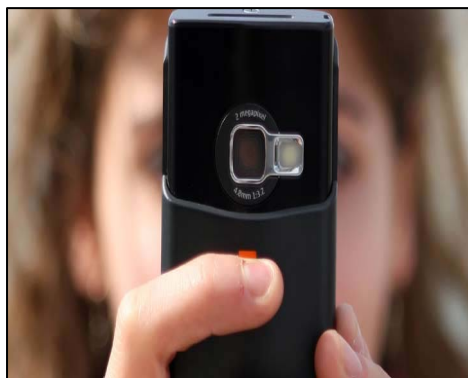
In an effort to better understand the intersection between sex and cyberspace with respect to attitudes and behavior, the national Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and *CosmoGirl.com*, commissioned an online survey of 1,280 respondents. Some 653 teens (ages 13-19) and 627 young adults (ages 20-26) participated in the survey between September 25, 2008 and October 3, 2008. Please visit www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech and www.cosmogirl.com/sexsurvey for more information about the survey, tips for parents and teens, and other related materials.

The survey found that teen girls are not the only ones sharing sexually explicit content. Almost one in five teen boys say they have sent or posted nude/semi nude images of themselves. Nearly one-quarter of teens admit that technology makes them personally more forward and aggressive. More than one-third of teens say exchanging sexy content makes dating or ‘hooking up’ with others more likely.

Teenagers are early adopters of technology. While this tech savvy knowledge can be seen as a positive, the survey reveals there is also a negative side. Teenagers should be aware of the real consequences of this type of behavior and parents need to provide them with guidance and encourage them to make smart choices.

But why exactly do teens send *sexts*? Is a

sexual revolution underway, with teens using photos as a sort of “mating call” or a kind of “modern day flirting?” Is *sexting* just today’s version of streaking, skinny-dipping, and mooning? Teen girls who have sent or posted sexually suggestive content provided a number of reasons why: two-thirds (66 percent) say they did so to be “fun or flirtatious”, half (52 percent) did so as a “sexy present” for their boy friend, and 40 percent as a “joke.” Even though nearly three-quarters of young people say that sending sexually suggestive content “can have serious negative consequences,” nearly one-quarter say sending sexually suggestive content is “no big deal.”



That technology is encouraging an even more casual, hookup-culture is reason for concern, given the high rates of teen and unplanned pregnancy in the United States. Parents should understand that their own notions of what’s public, what’s private, and what’s appropriate may differ greatly from how teens and young adults define these concepts. Here are 5 tips to help parents talk to their teens about sex and technology.

Talk to your kids about what they are doing in cyberspace.

Just as you need to talk openly and honestly with your kids about real life sex and relationships, you also want to discuss online

and cell phone activity. Explain that others might forward their pictures or messages to people they do not know or that they do not intend to share these with, and that school administrators and employers often look at online profiles to make judgments about potential students/employees.

Know who your kids are communicating with.

Of course it is a given that you want to know who your children are spending time with when they leave the house. Do your best to learn who your child is spending time with online and on the phone. Supervising and monitoring your child’s whereabouts doesn’t make you a nag; it’s just part of your job as a parent.

Consider limitations on electronic communications.

Be sure to limit the time your child spends online and on the phone. Consider, for example, telling your teen to leave the phone on the kitchen counter when they are at home and to take the laptop out of the bedroom before they go to bed, so they will not be tempted to log on or talk to friends at 2 a.m.

Be aware of what your teens are posting publicly.

Check out your teen’s social networking sites. This isn’t snooping—this is information your children are making public. If everyone else can look at it, why can’t you? Talk with them especially about their own notions of what is public and what is private.

Set expectations.

Make sure you are clear about what you consider appropriate “electronic” behavior. [5]

Summer Camp for Special Needs

Summer vacation is here for most, and many children are preparing for an unforgettable camp experience. Children with special needs are no exception. According to the Disabilities Statistics Center, an estimated 4 million children and adolescents under 18 years of age have disabilities. Of the more than 12,000 camps in the United

States, a large portion of them are designed specifically to fit the needs of disabled children. Whether your child has a learning or behavioral problem, a chronic illness, or a mental or physical impairment, several camps are available to meet your child’s specific needs. To find out more about summer camps for Special Needs go

to <http://www.aca-ny.org/benefits.php>. According to the American Camp Association your child can reap numerous benefits such as: making new friends, enjoying a variety of activities, making personal decisions, feeling good about themselves, being part of a special community, and having fun. [6]



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NFIA also co-sponsors the Addiction Studies Program for Journalists and for the States with Wake Forest University School of Medicine, the Treatment Research Institute, and the National Conference of State Legislatures. NFIA has been providing scientifically accurate information about alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use and addiction since it was founded in 1977.

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Parents Report Increased Awareness

The 2008 Parents Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and MetLife Foundation reveals a jump in the number of parents who are aware of their ability to influence their teens' decision to use drugs or alcohol.

As parents gain confidence in their prevention abilities, they are less likely to view educating kids about the risks of drug use as the responsibility of their child's school. Fewer than 1 in 3 parents in 2008 agreed that schools should be primarily responsible for drug education, down from nearly 40 percent in 2007.

The primary, and increasingly influential, cue for parent-teen discussions about drug and alcohol issues is the media, particularly television. In 2008, 70 percent of parents surveyed reported that something portrayed in the media prompted a conversation with their child about drugs or alcohol, and 64 percent specified that they were motivated to start a discussion by

seeing something drug-related on television.

The PATS data also revealed that more parents are prompted to address teen drug or alcohol use before special events, like graduation, and at key transition times when teens are most vulnerable, including starting a new grade or moving into middle or high school.

As parents feel more confident talking with their kids about the risks of drugs and alcohol use, it is crucial for them to capitalize on opportunities to keep the conversation going. Over the past decade, studies have indicated a steadily changing trend in what teens perceive as the motivations for using drugs. The "to have fun" rationales are declining, while motivations to use drugs to solve problems are increasing.

The percentage of parents who agreed with the statement "there is very little parents can do to prevent their kids from trying drugs" dropped nearly 40 percent since 2007 to just 21 percent in 2008. More parents believe that they can help prevent alcohol use as

well, with just 23 percent agreeing that there is little parents can do to prevent drinking, down from 34 percent in 2007.

Within the home, however, there are dramatic differences in attitudes between mothers and fathers. Fathers were nearly three times more likely to believe that drug education should take place in school. Additionally, fathers were far more likely (18 percent) to report having difficulty enforcing rules about alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use compared to mothers (10 percent). Fathers also placed a greater value on being their child's friend (59 percent of fathers, 51 percent of mothers), although the majority of parents thought friendship with their child was important.

Research consistently shows that teens who learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to use. Start talking and keep the conversation going. They are listening and want to hear from you. [7]