

The First Year of Middle School: A Critical Time

Your child's transition year from elementary school to middle school or junior high calls for extra vigilance on your part. The likelihood that kids will try drugs increases dramatically during this year. Your child is going to meet lots of new kids, seek acceptance, and start to make more—and bigger—choices. For the first time, your kids will be exposed to older kids who use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. New middle or junior high schoolers often think these older students are cool and may be tempted to try drugs to fit in.

During this time peer approval means everything and your children may make you feel unwelcome. While your children may pull away from you to establish their own identity—and may even seem embarrassed by you at times—they actually need you to be involved in their lives more than ever before.

To help your child make good choices during this critical time, you should:

- Make it very clear that you do not want her to use alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drugs.
- Find out if he really understands the consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.
- Get to know her friends by taking them to and from after-school activities, games, the library, and movies (while being sensitive to her need to feel independent). Check in with her friends' parents often to make sure you share the same anti-drug stance.
- Volunteer for activities where you can observe him at school.
- Hold a weekly family meeting to check in with each other and address problems or concerns.
- Get your kids involved with adult-supervised after-school activities.
- Give kids who are unsupervised after school a schedule of activities, limits on their behavior, household chores to accomplish, and a strict phone-in-to-you policy (along with easily accessible snacks).
- Make it easy for your child to leave a situation where alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs are being used.
- Call kids' parents if their home is to be used for a party; get assurance that no alcoholic beverages or illegal substances will be at the party.
- Set curfews and enforce them.
- Encourage open dialogue with your children about their experiences.

Source: Drug Free America

Compass Mark Drug & Alcohol Information Center
630 Janet Avenue
Lancaster, PA 17601
(717) 299-2831