

Grandparents Hold a Key to Keeping Teens Drug-Free

Today's grandparents do much more than bake cookies. 44% of grandparents see a grandchild every week and 45% of grandparents talk weekly or more with their grandchildren. According to a national survey conducted in conjunction with the 2000 Census, there are 2 million grandparent-headed homes with children under 18 and another 3.2 million grandparents live with and share parental responsibilities for their grandchildren. In other words, grandparents are doing more "parenting" than ever.

While parents are generally recognized as the most important and long-lasting influence on children, grandparents have a close and special bond and often serve as an inspiration to their grandkids. The unique relationship between grandparent and grandchild provides an ideal opening for a discussion of the dangers of drugs. Research shows that grandparents are looking for guidance on how to talk to their grandkids about difficult topics. In fact, according to a recent AARP survey, 54% of grandparents would find information about discussing drugs somewhat or very useful.

The following are tips for grandparents on keeping their grandchildren drug-free:

- **START:** It is never too early to prevent your grandchildren from trying drugs. Building protective factors, such as letting your grandchild know you care, plays an important role in deterring them from drugs. State your position clearly and often. One of the major reasons teens decide not to use drugs is the fear that their parents or other family members will lose respect for them. Teens do not want to let down their families.
- **CONNECT:** Take the opportunity to build lines of communication and do things regularly with your grandkids. Spend time together - eat dinner with them, read together, play a game, go shopping, go to the movies, a baseball game or go sightseeing together. Use opportunities like family gatherings or inviting your grandchildren to stay over to show that fun doesn't require drugs.
- **LISTEN:** Take a more active interest in what is going on in your grandchild's life. Listen to their cares and concerns by fostering family openness and communication. In this way, teens will feel more comfortable to open up to you when they need your advice.
- **EDUCATE:** Set a goal to spend 15-30 minutes this month discussing the dangers of using drugs with your grandkids. Continue the discussion on a regular basis.
- **CARE:** Make sure your grandchildren know you care that they are drug-free.
- **SUPPORT:** Explain to your grandchild that you are always there for them-no matter what happens. Make sure that they know to come to you for help or information.
- **LEARN:** Children today are sophisticated. In order to educate your grandchild about the dangers of drugs, you need to educate yourself first. Talk with others in

your community and learn about what messages kids are bombarded with everyday through peers, school and the media. It is up to grandparents to help teens sift through those messages and decipher right from wrong. Grandparents should also be aware of all the risks drugs pose.

- **LEAD:** Young people are as aware of what you do, as much as what you say. Don't just say the right things, do the right things. Set a good example. If you, yourself, have a substance abuse problem, get help.

Source: Drug Free America

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