

## BACK-TO-SCHOOL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT FOR PARENTS

Going back to school signifies a time of new beginnings – new schools, classes, and friends. It can also be a time of new challenges for many young people when it comes to drugs. As a parent, doing your homework and being a positive role model can impact your teen’s decision to not to use drugs. Parents can get smart about the risks associated with teens going back to school and make the grade in keeping their kids drug-free by completing the “homework assignments” below.

1. **Be aware of challenges facing your teen as they enter high school.** Teen acceptance of marijuana use and perceptions of normalcy increase dramatically during the transition from middle to high school, corresponding with an increase in use. Nationwide data indicates that the most dramatic increases in drug use occur between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades, and the rate continues to climb significantly between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.
2. **Get to know your teen’s friends and where they hang out.** Research shows that the majority of teens (ages 12-17) who smoked marijuana report getting it from their friends and usually received it inside a home, apartment, or dorm. Hanging around users of marijuana often means exposure not only to other illegal drugs, but also to a lifestyle that can include trouble in school, engaging in sexual activity while young, unintended pregnancy, difficulties with the law, and other problems.
3. **Help your teen reject peer pressure.** Young people who learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to try drugs than their peers who don’t get drug information from their parents. In fact, two-thirds of young people said that losing the respect of family and friends is one of the main reasons they don’t smoke marijuana or use other drugs.
4. **Schedule time with your teen to discuss your family’s “no drug use” policy – set and enforce rules with clear consequences for breaking them.** Make your position clear when it comes to dangerous substances like alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Don’t assume that your children know where you stand. Although virtually all parents in America (98 percent) say they’ve talked with their children about drugs, only 27 percent of teens – roughly one in four – say they’re learning a lot at home about the risks of drugs.
5. **Eat meals together as often as you can.** Meals are a great opportunity to talk about the day’s events, to unwind, and bond. Studies show that kids whose families eat together at least 5 times a week are less likely to be involved with drugs or alcohol.
6. **Involve your teen in supervised activities.** Approximately 91 percent of youths nationwide participated in one or more school-based, community-based, church- or faith-based, or other activities (e.g., karate lessons) during the past year. And,

teens involved in after school activities or programs were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than youths who did not participate in supervised activities during the past year.

7. **Check in with your teen after school.** The danger zone for drug use is between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. If you can, try to arrange flex time at work so you can be home during those hours. Or, you can get your teen into a routine of calling you when they get home from school to check in and let you know where they are. If your child will be with friends, make sure there is adult supervision – not just an older sibling.
8. **Watch for a decline in your teen’s school performance.** Students with a “D” average were five times more likely to have used illicit drugs in the past month than students with an “A” average. Also, teens with particularly negative attitudes about school were two and a half times more likely to have used marijuana in the past year than youth with positive attitudes towards school.
9. **Know the warning signs of drug use.** Changes to take notice of are: acting distant from family or friends, hanging out with a different crowd, changes in moods or attitudes, lack of interest in personal appearance, changes in clothing, and dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits.
10. **Be a better listener.** Ask questions – and encourage your teen to ask questions of you. Paraphrase what your child says to you. Ask for their input about family decisions. Showing your willingness to listen will make your child feel more comfortable about opening up to you.
11. **Stay involved in your teen’s life.** Help your teen with homework assignments and projects, limit time spent watching TV and using the Internet, limit the amount of time spent with friends on school nights, give him or her responsibilities around the house, and remember to recognize successes and good behavior.

This article is brought to you by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. Resources and information on what to do to keep your teens drug-free are available on [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com). Additional materials, including brochures, posters, and postcards, are available free of charge through the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-788-2800.