

Don't Let Drugs Tackle Your Teen

As a working parent, you know that your child's participation in sports is not only a fun activity for them, but a great way for you to keep them busy and active after school or during the summer. But just because your teen is involved with sports, it doesn't mean they are immune to the pressures of using drugs, alcohol or performance-enhancing drugs. In fact, pressure to win for a variety of reasons, the big state championship title or a college scholarship, may increase the odds of drug use, even by teenagers.

The behavior of celebrity athletes can also send confusing signals to young athletes about the consequences of drug use. Teens see professional athletes who test positive for marijuana or performance-enhancing drugs, but rarely do they see coverage of the negative health, social and emotional consequences of this drug use.

You may be unaware that young athletes are just as likely as non-athletes to use drugs, particularly performance-enhancing drugs. Steroids can be appealing to teen athletes, especially those feeling pressure to succeed. A recent study showed that approximately 1.1 million young people between the ages of 12 and 17 have taken potentially dangerous performance-enhancing drugs or dietary sports supplements.

But steroids shouldn't be the only concern for parents of teen athletes. Every day, approximately 4,700 American teens try marijuana for the first time. And by the time they reach the eighth grade, nearly half of all teens have had at least one drink of alcohol and more than 20 percent say they have been "drunk."

Any drug or alcohol use can negatively affect a child's athletic performance, health and future. Marijuana and alcohol can decrease speed, balance, depth perception, hand-eye coordination and reaction times. Steroid use can damage the body, affect hormone development, and cause unwanted muscle mass to develop which decreases agility and quickness. In addition, drugs and alcohol can affect academic performance and keep young athletes off their school teams.

Like a good referee, parents need to make the rules clear: No Drugs or Drinking. By staying involved in your kid's life and setting firm rules and penalties for breaking them, your family can make a big difference when your teen is faced with tough decisions. In fact, teens say that losing their parents' respect and trust is a major reason why they don't use drugs. With your support, your young athlete can be a winner in sports and in the game of life.

This article is brought to you by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. Visit TheAntiDrug.com for additional tips for parents of teen athletes and to download free resources. Materials are also available through the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-788-2800.