

Gearing Up for a Drug-Free School Year

Going back to school signifies a time of new beginnings -- new notebooks, classes, and friends. It can also be a time of new challenges for many young people when it comes to drugs. Every day, approximately 4,400 American youth ages 12-17 try marijuana for the first time. That is equal to the enrollment of nearly six average-sized U.S. high schools.

But that doesn't mean there's nothing parents can do. Research shows that involvement in supervised activities during the school year lowers a teen's risk of using marijuana and other illicit drugs. In fact, according to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, teens who participate in team sports are 40 percent less likely to have used marijuana in the past month than those who don't. And teens who participated in two or more youth activities in the past year were half as likely to have used an illicit drug in the past month as other teens.

Parents should also watch for warning signs of drug use by their teen, such as struggles in the classroom. 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. Parents should also know that teens with particularly negative attitudes about school are two and a half times more likely to have used marijuana in the past year than youth with positive attitudes towards school.

Other warning signs of marijuana use include acting distant from family or friends, hanging out with a different crowd, lack of interest in personal appearance, or dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits.

Marijuana can lead to a host of health, social and behavioral problems at a crucial time in kids' lives, when their bodies and brains are still developing. Marijuana can be addictive and more teens are in drug treatment for marijuana than for all other illicit drugs combined.

The good news is that parents make a difference in their teen's decision to stay drug-free. Two-thirds of kids say that upsetting their parents or losing the respect of family and friends is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs. Parents can also help keep their kids drug-free by monitoring where they are, who they are with and setting rules with clear consequences for breaking them.

This article is brought to you by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. For more information on marijuana and keeping your teen drug-free, visit www.theantidrug.com. The site also offers a free pamphlet called "Wake Up to the Risks of Marijuana: A Guide for Parents." The pamphlet can also be ordered by calling 1-800-788-2800.