

HELPING HAND

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Making Good Decisions

Sooner or later, most American children will be offered drugs and will have to make a conscious decision to accept or reject them. And they will likely be faced with this decision many times before they grow out of adolescence. How can you make sure children will make the right choice?

"Teachers and parents can help their children learn how to say no when a friend offers drugs by role-playing with them the ways they make tough life choices," says Ruth Wooden, president of the National Parenting Association in New York. She says, "If kids see how you deal with the tough issues of daily life and how you consider options, your kids will have firsthand experience with their own tough choices." She advises parents and teachers to ask their children questions like, "My boss wants me to work this weekend and I really would rather not. How do I tell him no without getting in trouble?" Or "Grandma is going to be mad at me if I tell her I don't like the gift she gave me for Christmas. Any ideas on how to handle this?"

"The point is, the children need to learn that tough choices are part of everyone's life and it takes practice to think through decision-making strategies. Help kids get practice and let them know your life is not stress-free either," Wooden says.

Wooden points out two key times to watch for when children may be most vulnerable to use drugs. One is when they are feeling really low, maybe after a bad test or losing a game or when a friend moves away. The notion that drugs will make you feel better can have a lot of appeal during the down times. Children need to be alerted to the fact that the best decision to make when they are feeling blue is no decision at all. Important decisions require them to be thinking clearly and being sad or depressed is a time when they should be prepared to stay put and not make any major decision.



The other dangerous time is when children have had a string of good luck (i.e., when they are feeling on top of the world and everything is going right). These times can blind them into believing that they can do anything and it will turn out fine.

Children need to involve adults in their lives in order to make clear-headed decisions in both instances. Wooden says, "When they see our decision process, or better yet, when we ask them for their opinion, they get real-life practice in a safe space."

For more information about teaching children to make good decisions about drugs and alcohol, visit www.theantidrug.com.

How Teachers and School Administrators Can Make Schools More Safe:



Ten Ways to Stop School Violence

1. Immediately report to the principal any threats and signs of, or discussions of, weapons, gang activity, or other conditions that might invite or encourage violence. Encourage students to report crimes or activities that seem suspicious.
2. Set rules for behavior in your classroom. Refuse to permit violence. Invite students to help set penalties and enforce the rules.
3. Enforce school policies that seek to reduce the risk of violence. Be fair, but firm and consistent. Take responsibility for areas outside, as well as inside, your classroom.
4. Do not tolerate bullying in any form. Insist that students not resort to name-calling or teasing. Encourage them to demonstrate the respect they expect for themselves.
5. Learn the warning signs of violence. Know how to recognize "at-risk" kids that may be potentially violent and how to get the appropriate help using your school's resources.
6. Help implement a Safe School Plan, including how teachers and administrators should respond in emergencies. Suggest presenting the plan at a schoolwide assembly.
7. Encourage and sponsor student-led antiviolence activities and programs such as peer education, teen courts, mediation, mentoring, and violence prevention training.
8. Learn and teach conflict resolution and anger management skills. Have students practice through role-playing activities. Incorporate discussions on these skills and violence prevention into your lessons whenever possible.
9. Teach with enthusiasm. Students engaged in work that is challenging, informative, and rewarding are less likely to get into trouble. Reserve a time during the week where they can offer lesson suggestions and opinions on class.
10. Talk to parents. Regularly invite parents to discuss their children's progress and any concerns they have. Send home notes celebrating children's achievements.

Consider this list a launching pad. More suggestions and school safety resources can be found *How to Talk to Your Kids About School Violence* by Dr. Ken Druck, Author, Psychologist and Violence Prevention Expert.

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Teen Mental Health Problems: What Are the Warning Signs?

Adolescents are under stress to be well liked, do well in school and make important life decisions. Most of these pressures are unavoidable and worrying about them is natural. But if a teen you know is feeling extremely sad, hopeless or worthless, they could be experiencing warning signs of a mental health problem.

Mental health problems are real, painful and can be severe. They can lead to school failure, loss of friends or family conflict. Some of the signs that may signify a problem include the following.

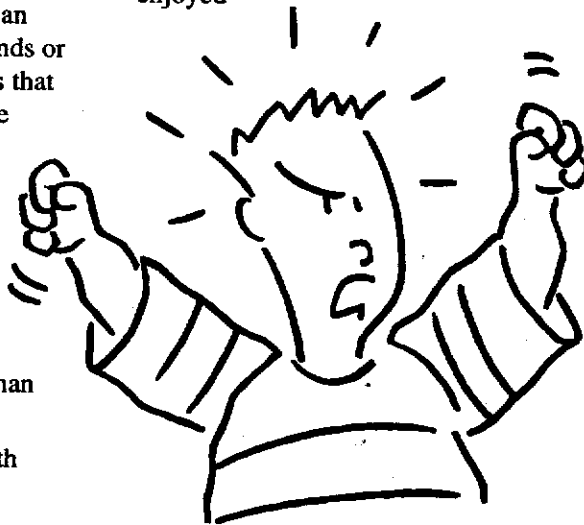
Is troubled by feeling:

- very angry most of the time, cries a lot and overreacts to things
- worthless or guilty
- anxious or worried a lot more than other young people
- grief for a long time after a death or loss

- extremely fearful
- constantly concerned about physical problems or appearance
- frightened that his or her mind is controlled or is out of control

Experiences big changes like:

- does much worse in school
- loses interest in things usually enjoyed



- has unexplained changes in sleeping or eating habits
- avoids friends and/or family
- daydreams too much and can't get things done
- hears voices that cannot be explained

Is limited by:

- poor concentration, can't make decisions
- inability to sit still or focus
- worry about being harmed
- persistent nightmares
- thoughts that race almost too fast to follow

To find help, call Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) National Mental Health Information Center at 800-789-2647; (TDD) 301-7443-9006

Alcohol Dependence or Abuse and Age at First Use

In 2003, males aged 21 or older were more likely than females to report having first used alcohol before age 15. Persons reporting first use of alcohol before age 15 were more than five times as likely to report past-year alcohol dependence or abuse than persons who first used alcohol at age 21 or older.

Among the 14 million adults aged 21 or older who were classified as having past year alcohol dependence or abuse, more than 13 million (95%) had started using alcohol before age 21. Recent research has focused on the association between the age at which a person first uses alcohol and alcohol problems later in life. Delaying the onset of alcohol use has been proposed as a strategy to prevent alcohol dependence or abuse in adulthood.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks persons aged 12 or older to report on their age at first use of alcohol, their use of alcohol during the past year and in the past month, as well as their symptoms of alcohol dependence or abuse during the past year. NSDUH defines alcohol dependence or abuse using criteria specified in the

American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), which include such symptoms as recurrent alcohol use resulting in physical danger, trouble with the law due to alcohol use, increased tolerance to alcohol, and giving up or reducing other important activities in favor of alcohol use.³

Age at First Use of Alcohol

In 2003, almost 74% of adults aged 21 or older reported that they had started using alcohol before the current legal drinking age of 21. This group of 74% consists of persons aged 21 or older who first used alcohol before the age of 12 (4%), persons who first used alcohol between the ages of 12 and 14 (14%), persons who first used alcohol between the ages of 15 and 17 (33%), and persons who first used alcohol between the ages of 18 and 20 (22%). Among adults aged 21 or older, 12% reported that they had never used alcohol, and about 14% reported that they had first used alcohol after they had reached age 21.



Social Action Exercise
Grade level 9-12

Objectives

To help students explore ways in which they can be agents for change in their school and share that experience with others.

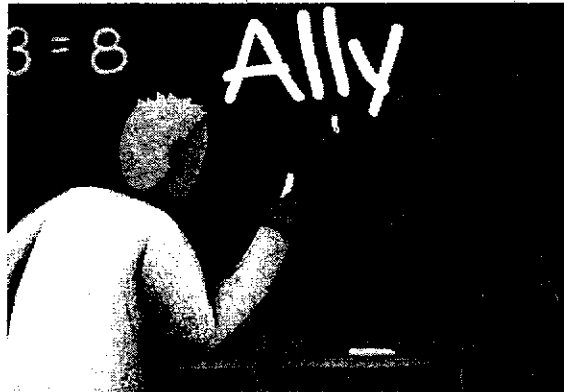
To help students explore safe and realistic ways in which they can act as an ally.

Materials

Flipchart paper

Instructions

1. Have students choose an issue in their school and/or community they would like to see change.
2. Ask students to think about the things they could do as a group to create the change. Write their responses on the flip chart.
3. Ask students to think about the things they could do as individuals. Write their responses on the flip chart and post them in the room.
4. At this time introduce the term "ally," and ask students to provide you with the definition of an ally. (Some responses may include someone who helps, supports, or speaks out on behalf of someone else.)
5. Next on the flip chart paper, make two columns and label them "Risk" and "Benefits."
6. Have students brainstorm the "Risk" and "Benefits" associated with being an ally. Post their comments on the wall.



7. Have students apply the term "ally" to activist groups they know about and identify the risks undertaken by those "allies." For instance people who sheltered Jews during the holocaust, freedom riders, Underground Railroad conductors and people with disabled friends or relatives.

8. Have students answer the following questions:
Why did you choose the project?
Why do you believe your action will make a difference in your school?
What did you learn from this activity?
What did you learn from others insight about social action?
9. If time permits, explore the following questions with students:
What are threats to equality?
What stops you from working toward equality?

*This activity is from the **Mix It Up** activity book which supports young people who want to improve the climate of their schools and communities by challenging social boundaries, cliques and other group divisions. The Southern Poverty Law Center and the Study Circles Resource Center joined forces to create **Mix It Up**.*

For more information, contact:

For more information about Chippewa Valley Schools' Student Assistance (drug and violence prevention) programming, please call 586/723-2360.