



Prevention Strategies for Parents—Part 9

FREE LIFE-CHANGING ONLINE PARENTING COURSES

In these video-based, interactive classes—available 24/7—you'll learn a consistent, encouraging style of parenting that will benefit you and your children for a lifetime. With this self-study course, you have the option of when to participate based on your own schedule and at your convenience. Gain additional insight from your online group leaders as they provide support and feedback.

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For parents of children from birth to age 5
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- **Crossroads of Parenting & Divorce:**
For divorced and divorcing parents

Continue your experience as an “active” parent by reviewing what you learn in the class in your accompanying parent guide. Each guide contains additional information, activities, and worksheets to help you practice what you learn.

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This month we'll be focusing on how to identify and confront high-risk behavior. Preventing drug use, reckless sexuality, violence and other high-risk behaviors is more than a matter of setting guidelines and hoping for the best. As the saying goes, “*You get what you inspect, not what you expect.*” In other words, it takes vigilance on the part of parents to make sure their teens are keeping their agreements and behaving safely. Is your teen going to parties where there are drugs or alcohol present? Are they smoking cigarettes behind your back? To find out, you have to keep your eyes open—and your mind open, too. In other words, beware of convincing yourself so well that your teen “would never do that,” you don't recognize the signs when they do. Let's explore the process of identifying and confronting high-risk behavior in your teen. We'll focus on one of the biggest problems that parents of teens worry about: the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. The best way to fight drug use is to prevent it from starting in the first place. Educating teens about the harmful effects of drugs long before the teen years is ideal. If that isn't possible, there is still a lot you can do.

We talked about the importance of establishing a no-use rule in your family. This is a good starting place, but for any rule to be effective, the parent must be willing to expend the energy to detect when it is being violated. One of the best ways to determine whether teens are using alcohol or other drugs is to notice their behavior when they come in at night. Do they act incoherent or odd? Do you smell alcohol on their breath? Are their pupils dilated? By being observant, you may be able to determine not only whether your teen is hanging around peers who use alcohol and drugs, but whether they are using themselves. Parents always wonder whether they should search a teen's room. If you have reasonable grounds to believe your teen is harmfully involved with alcohol or other drugs, we believe you have the right to go through their belongings in search of hard evidence with which to confront them. It is almost impossible to find out if your teen is involved with illegal substances by asking. They are likely to say “no” whether they are using or not. As a last resort, the availability of drug-screening through hospitals, drug treatment centers and at-home testing kits can provide a way to confirm if they are using drugs or not.

If you suspect your teen is using alcohol or drugs, you must first deal with your own anger, resentment, or guilt. Don't take their use of these as a sign you are a bad parent. Remember that parents are not the only influence on a teen's development. Although you may feel justified in being angry, a calm, firm reaction produces the best results and the use of solid communication with logical consequences. When you confront out of caring, and not from anger, your teen is much more likely to respond positively. Think about your goals for the confrontation. These goals can vary, based on the degree of use by your teen. If your teen appears to be in the early stages of use, your goal may be to reach an agreement to cease all use. If their use is more advanced, your goal will be to get them into a treatment program. If you're unsure how far along their use is your goal may be to have an evaluation done by a local mental health center, a physician or a hospital that specializes in this. Whatever goal you decide on, act now and take control of the situation.

To learn more about effective parenting skills, visit the Active Parenting Online Video Library. These helpful videos are offered free of charge by the ACFC in partnership with Active Parenting. Guidance and help are available for parents of children of all ages. To access the Online Video Library, go to the [ACFC website](https://www.acfccares.com), click on the Active Parenting tab, and follow the instructions on how to view the videos.