

## Safe Homes for Parents of Younger Elementary Students

The Council on Chemical Abuse includes parents of elementary aged students in the Safe Homes network. While the typical reaction from parents of lower elementary age children is "we will deal with that when the time comes!" we recognize some very special advantages to early prevention efforts:

Starting early is easier and a continuation of the prevention/protection efforts parents have used since their children were born.

▶ Developing expectations with logical/meaningful consequences is an effective way to discipline (*teach* - not punish) children at any age, and about many issues, not just alcohol and other drugs.

**Networking** - communicating with other parents provides an opportunity to develop constructive guidelines and consistent limits on a wide variety of topics which today's parents face. The earlier parents begin networking, the easier it is to continue into the teen years.

▶ Using a parent network and meaningful consequences when your children are young allows kids to become used to these important boundaries; they can expect parents to be communicating with each other throughout the school years, even as they develop larger, different peer groups in junior and senior high school.

▶ Parents can take advantage of the fact that younger kids *want* parents to take active, visible roles in school and/or school related activities. *However, parents must not be lulled into a false sense of complacency by thinking that early participation is enough.*

Developmental changes that occur in preadolescence *require continued efforts and active involvement after elementary school.*

In addition to these facts, parents of younger children need accurate information about the surprisingly young average age of first use; the effectiveness of advertising on even very young children, where alcohol is concerned, and how it can influence children to decide well before initial use that he/she wants to be a part of the current scene; the likelihood of baby sitters and other teens (neighborhood teens, relatives, etc) encouraging use.

**All Parents Need Awareness and Accurate Information** - Schools and community organizations are doing their part in prevention efforts, but educated parents are the real prevention for their children!

### ▶ Protective Factors and Risk Factors

Risk factors tell us what to focus on to reduce unhealthy behaviors. Protective factors are those whose characteristics and processes that have been shown by research to mediate the negative effects of exposure to risk factors by young people. The more risk factors present, the greater the risk for alcohol and substance abuse.

LIFE AREA OR "DOMAIN"	PROTECTIVE FACTORS	RISK FACTORS
<b>Individual</b>	Positive personal characteristics, including social skills and social responsiveness; cooperativeness; emotional stability; positive sense of self; flexibility; problem-solving skills; and low levels of defensiveness. Bonding to societal institutions and values, including attachments to parents and extended family; commitment to school; regular involvement with religious institutions; and belief in society's values. Social and emotional competence, including good communication skills; responsiveness; empathy; caring; sense of humor; inclinations toward pro-social behavior; problem-solving skills sense of autonomy; sense of purpose and of the future; and self-discipline.	Inadequate life skills. Lack of self-control, assertiveness, and peer-refusal skills. Low self-esteem and self-confidence. Emotional and psychological problems. Favorable attitudes toward substance use. Rejection of commonly held values and religion. School failure. Lack of school bonding. Early antisocial behavior, such as lying, stealing, and aggression, particularly in boys, often combined with shyness or hyperactivity.
<b>Family</b>	Positive bonding among family members. Parenting that includes high levels of warmth and avoidance of severe criticism; sense of basic trust; high parental expectations; and clear and consistent expectations, including children's participation in family decisions and responsibilities. An emotionally supportive parental/family milieu, including parental attention to children's interests; orderly and structured parent-child relationships; and parent involvement in homework and school-related activities.	Family conflict and domestic violence. Family disorganization. Lack of family cohesion. Social isolation of family. Heightened family stress. Family attitudes favorable to drug use. Ambiguous, lax, or inconsistent rules and sanctions regarding substance use. Poor child supervision and discipline. Unrealistic expectations for development.
<b>Peer</b>	Association with peers who are involved in school, recreation, service, religion, or other organized activities.	Association with delinquent peers who use or value dangerous substances. Association with peers who reject mainstream activities or pursuits. Susceptibility to negative peer pressure. Strong external locus of control.

<b>School</b>	Caring and support; sense of "community" in classroom and school. High expectations from school personnel. Clear standards and rules for appropriate behavior. Youth participation, involvement, and responsibility in school tasks and decisions.	Ambiguous, lax, or inconsistent rules and sanctions regarding drug use and student conduct. Favorable staff and student attitudes toward substance use. Harsh or arbitrary student management practices. Availability of dangerous substances on school premises. Lack of school bonding.
<b>Community</b>	Caring and support. High expectations of youth. Opportunities for youth participation in community activities.	Community disorganization. Lack of community bonding. Lack of cultural pride. Lack of competence in majority culture. Community attitudes favorable to drug use. Ready availability of dangerous substances. Inadequate youth services and opportunities for pro-social involvement.
<b>Society</b>	Media literacy (resistance to pro-use messages). Decreased accessibility. Increased pricing through taxation. Raised purchasing age and enforcement. Stricter driving-while-under-the-influence laws.	Impoverishment. Unemployment and Underemployment. Discrimination. Pro-drug-use messages in the media.