

# Speaking Up

How and when do you draw a line and risk telling a friend, neighbor or parent that their kid is using drugs or alcohol?

The best guideline for taking action on factual information you have regarding alcohol or other drug use by an adolescent is to ask yourself the following questions:

- Would you feel guilty if someone you knew overdosed or were involved in a DUI?
  - If it would bother your conscience, risk the consequences of telling someone.
  - Is the alcohol or other drug use a potential threat to the health and well being of the person?
- If you are maintaining a "trust" relationship with the user, or your child is preventing you from taking action, ask yourself - What should take priority in your decision - life or trust? Sometimes in order to save a life, the circle of trust must be expanded. You make the choices, make decisions you can live with! **Never put yourself in danger.**

Doing nothing is enabling drug use among adolescents. Not communicating your concern allows youth to continue to use substances. Our silence sends a strong message to youth that we condone their alcohol and other drug use.

## Let's Look at the Bottom Line

What are the potential negative consequences or risks we take by telling someone?

- Loss of friendship.
- Possibly hurting someone by exposing their denial of the problem.
- Risk exposing sensitive feelings.
- Possibly being accused of being a "busy-body," "narc" or a "snitch."
- Becoming emotionally involved in the situation.
- Possibly being blamed or faulted for your involvement.
- DEATH - Getting involved, in some instances, can be very dangerous. If this is true for you, look to a Student Assistance Program team member, guidance counselor, teacher, or other trusted adult for help.

## It's Time to Stop Denying a Problem Exists! Realize and weigh the risks. Be willing to take action!

Show them that you care for them enough by:

- Sharing your concern with your child.
- Speaking to the abuser.
- Speaking to the youth's parents.

## Share Your Concern With Your Child

If your child is a friend of the youth who is abusing alcohol or other drug it is important to share with them why you feel you must take action.

- Explain that you are telling what you know because you are worried and concerned.
  - Emphasize it is not "snitching" but reaching out to help someone.
  - Your goal is not to get the user in trouble, but to get him/her help.
  - Suggest they share the drug/alcohol use they have observed with their friend.
  - Give your child the opportunity to tell their friend's parents instead of you doing it.
- (If this is too risky for the child, an adult can offer to go with the child to help the parent/guardian find help.)*

## Speak to the Alcohol or Other Drug User

Be objective and honest. Share what changes in behavior and attitude you have personally observed.

- Stay calm.
- Don't lecture, moralize, scold, blame, threaten, argue, attack, or lose your temper.
- Share physical evidence of drug/alcohol usage.
- Don't allow the user to lie to you. Taking responsibility for oneself is essential to motivating a person to find help.
- Accept no promises. Work towards a pledge to take action and develop a plan to seek help.

## Speaking to the Youth's Parents

Explain that you are concerned and that is difficult deciding whether or not to come forward and tell them what you know.

- Stick to the facts as you know them.
- Share only what you have personally observed. Denial is normal - keep talking!
- Don't put the parents on the defensive or in a corner.
- Be empathetic and give them support.
- Remember that blaming, criticizing or lecturing won't help resolve the problem.
- Allow the parents to open up and to express their feelings and frustrations to you.
- Suggest that they contact someone to help and support them in assessing the extent of their child's alcohol or other drug use.