

Grandparents Hold A Key to Keeping Teens Drug Free

Today's grandparents do much more than bake cookies. Sixty-eight percent of grandparents see a grandchild every one-to-two weeks and eighty percent of grandparents talk on the phone with their grandchildren at least once every few weeks. According to a national survey conducted in conjunction with the 2000 Census, there are 4.5 million grandparent-headed homes with children under 18 and another 6.1 million grandparents live with and share parental responsibilities for their grandchildren. In other words, grandparents are doing more "parenting" than ever.

While parents are generally recognized as the most important and long-lasting influence on children, grandparents have a close and special bond and often serve as an inspiration to their grandkids. The unique relationship between grandparent and grandchild provides an ideal opening for a discussion about the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

Research shows that grandparents are looking for guidance on how to talk to their grandkids about difficult topics. In fact, according to an AARP survey, 54 percent of grandparents would find information about discussing drugs and alcohol somewhat or very useful.

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America offers the following tips for grandparents to keep their grandkids drug-free:



START: It is never too early to prevent your grandchildren from trying drugs and alcohol. Building protective factors -- such as letting your grandchild know you care, plays an important role in deterring them from drugs. State your position clearly and often. One of the major reasons teens decide not to use drugs is the fear that their parents or other family members will lose respect for them. Teens do not want to let down their families.



CONNECT: Take the opportunity to build lines of communication and do things regularly with your grandkids. Spend time together — take a walk with them, read together, play a game, go shopping, go to the movies, a baseball game or go sightseeing together. Use opportunities like family gatherings or inviting your grandchildren to stay over to show that fun doesn't require drugs.



LISTEN: Take a more active interest in what is going on in your grandchild's life. Listen to their cares and concerns by fostering family openness and communication. In this way, teens will feel more comfortable to open up to you when they need your advice.



EDUCATE: Set a goal to spend 15-30 minutes this month discussing the dangers of using drugs and alcohol with your grandkids. Continue the discussion on a regular basis.



CARE: Make sure your grandchildren know you care that they are drug-free.



SUPPORT: Explain to your grandchild that you are always there for them — no matter what happens. Make sure that they know to come to you for help or information.



LEARN: Children today are sophisticated. In order to educate your grandchild about the dangers of drugs, you need to educate yourself first. Talk with others in your community and learn about what messages kids are bombarded with everyday through peers, school and the media. It is up to adult family members, like grandparents, to help teens sift through those messages and decipher right from wrong. Grandparents should also be aware of all the risks drugs and alcohol pose.



LEAD: Young people are as aware of what you do, as much as what you say. Don't just say the right things, do the right things. Set a good example. If you yourself have a substance abuse problem, get help now.

For more resources on being a grandparent, please visit **AARP's Grandparent** section.

DID YOU KNOW?

- There are currently about 56 million grandparents in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- 4.5 million children are living in households headed by grandparents (AARP)
- 5.8 million people aged 30 or over were grandparents who lived in households with children under the age of 18 (U.S. Census 2000)
- Most grandparents (68%) said they see a grandchild every one or two weeks. (The AARP Grandparenting Survey, 2002)
- Only 45% of grandparents say they discuss illegal drugs with their grandchildren (The AARP Grandparenting Survey, 2002)
- 6.1 million children live with a grandparent (8% of all children in the U.S.) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement)

Source: AARP Grandparenting Survey, November 1999, November 2001